

FINAL REPORT

**Understanding the  
Intersection Between  
TANF and Refugee  
Cash Assistance**

OPRE Report No. 2018-42

# Understanding the Intersection Between TANF and Refugee Cash Assistance

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## Overview

### Introduction

Since 1975, the United States has resettled more than three million refugees whose diversity of skills, education, and culture requires that public and private organizations assisting them be able to provide a wide range of services. Upon arrival in the United States, two federally funded cash assistance programs help low-income refugees on their path to self-sufficiency: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for those with dependent minor children and Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) for those who do not qualify for TANF. Both programs are funded and administered by the Administration for Children and Families within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. States, however, have broad flexibility in implementing TANF and RCA programs and the related employment services, and as a result, programs vary by state.

While refugees make up a small proportion of the TANF caseload, they may require more intensive services reflecting their status and particular needs. Coordination with resettlement agencies and refugee-serving organizations more accustomed to working with refugees may ensure appropriate services are provided. Research on how refugee-serving programs collaborate to provide assistance and help refugees obtain employment has been limited. Service providers seeking to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency in a short time-frame need promising strategies for better serving refugees.

### Primary Research Questions

1. What do we know about how different states and local sites (e.g., counties) administer benefits and services for refugees through TANF and RCA?
2. Are there innovative strategies being implemented to help refugees obtain employment and ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency in the United States?
3. To what extent and in what ways are states integrating or coordinating TANF, RCA, and associated services to better serve the diverse needs of the refugees?
4. What data are currently collected by states, local sites, and service providers regarding refugee services and their self-sufficiency outcomes?

### Purpose

The study's main purpose was to learn how state and local systems serve refugees through TANF and RCA, how state and program-level staff coordinate the delivery of services provided to refugees, and how TANF and RCA programs and practices aim to foster positive employment outcomes and refugee self-sufficiency. In addition, this study explored the availability of existing data that could be analyzed to better understand refugee services under TANF and RCA.

## Key Findings and Highlights

Key findings from the report include:

- **The unique characteristics of the refugee population present a number of challenges to agencies and organizations serving them.** These challenges include linguistic barriers, cultural differences between newly arriving refugees and other program participants, specific policies and processes that apply to them, and the heterogeneity among refugees, who arrive with a wide range of skills and education, from educated professionals to laborers who are unable to read or write in their home language.
- **The types of organizations administering cash assistance and employment services for TANF and RCA recipients vary by state and by program.** In most states, local public assistance agency staff determine refugees' eligibility for both TANF and RCA; in some states, resettlement agencies determine eligibility for and administer RCA. In some, RCA recipients and many TANF recipients receive refugee-specific employment services; in others, TANF-receiving refugees participate in employment services alongside non-refugees.
- **Refugee-specific organizations are often better equipped to work with refugees than are public assistance agencies.** Agency staff serving the general population often lack the specialized knowledge, language skills, and experience working with refugees that refugee-serving organizations (RSOs) possess. Some agencies compensate for this by increasing coordination with RSOs or by contracting with them to provide TANF employment services.
- **Providers have developed various strategies for helping refugees find employment.** Employment services for refugees typically combine job readiness assistance and English language instruction and focus on rapid employment. Examples of other strategies include specialized programs for high-skilled refugees and more intensive job development than is typical in general employment services programs.
- **Data exist that could help researchers and program administrators better understand the effectiveness of strategies for serving refugees.** However, the nature of the data and the types of systems in which they are stored vary by state, and researchers cannot use a one-size-fits-all approach to obtain data on refugee cash assistance and employment services from states or programs serving refugees.

## Methods

The study gathered information from three sources:

- Consultations with non-federal experts and federal program staff.

- An online survey administered in January 2016 to 51 State Refugee Coordinators (in the 49 states with refugee resettlement programs, plus the District of Columbia and California's San Diego County, which administers its own program)
- Site visits to eight localities serving refugees, conducted in 2016, which involved in-depth interviews with managers and staff at agencies and organizations serving refugees, and focus groups with refugees served.

## Glossary

**Refugees:** Individuals and families unable to live in their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. This report uses the term refugee to refer to all populations eligible for U.S. refugee services, including asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Amerasians, and victims of a severe form of trafficking.

**Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA):** A program administered by the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Administration for Children and Families that provides cash assistance to refugees who meet the income eligibility requirements for TANF but do not have dependent children.

**Refugee-serving organization (RSO):** Resettlement agencies and other community-based organizations that specialize in serving refugees.

**Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** The primary cash assistance program for low-income families with at least one dependent child. It is a federal block grant administered to states by the Office of Family Assistance within the Administration for Children and Families.

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## Executive Summary

Refugees are resettled in the United States because they face persecution in their home country based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. When they first arrive in their new communities, refugees are eligible for several federally funded cash, medical, and social assistance programs, including the **Refugee Cash Assistance** (RCA) program, funded by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families** (TANF) block grant program, administered by ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA). In addition to providing cash assistance, ORR and TANF programs fund an array of employment and social services to support newly arrived refugees. Together, these services are critical in helping refugees quickly become as self-sufficient as possible.

Given states' broad flexibility in implementing TANF and RCA programs and related employment services, programs vary considerably by state. While refugees make up a small proportion of the TANF caseload, they may require more intensive services reflecting their status and particular needs. Coordination with resettlement agencies and refugee-serving organizations more accustomed to working with refugees may ensure appropriate services are provided.

To better understand how financial supports and employment services are provided to refugees, ACF contracted with Abt Associates and its partner, MEF Associates, to conduct a study on the intersection between TANF and RCA services. The study's main purposes are to examine how state and local systems serve refugees through TANF and RCA, how state and program-level staff coordinate the delivery of services provided to refugees, and how TANF and RCA programs and practices aim to foster positive employment outcomes and refugee self-sufficiency. In addition, the study explores the availability of existing data that could be used to analyze the effectiveness of refugee services under TANF and RCA.

Information for the study was collected through three sources: consultations with non-federal experts and federal program staff with expertise in refugee policy and the programs being studied; an online survey of State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs), with responses from 47 states, the District of Columbia, and San Diego County, CA; and site visits to eight localities (Arapahoe County, CO; Cook County, IL; Fairfax County, VA; Franklin County, OH; Jefferson County, KY; King County, WA; Montgomery County, MD; and Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI).

## Background on Refugee Services

In most instances the process for refugees resettled in the United States begins with a referral for resettlement by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security approves refugees for admission to the United States based on interviews and other evidence, including security checks. The U.S. Department of

State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration processes approved refugees while they are still overseas.

Upon arrival in the United States, refugees initially are assisted by one of nine national resettlement agencies under cooperative agreements with the Department of State specifying the services they will provide. Local affiliates of the resettlement agencies provide initial services funded by the Department of State's Reception and Placement (R&P) Program during refugees' first 30 to 90 days in the country. As part of these services, resettlement agencies help newly arrived refugees connect with public benefit programs, including cash assistance.<sup>1</sup>

States administer two main types of cash assistance programs for refugees:

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** provides cash assistance program and other benefits for low-income U.S. families with at least one dependent minor child (or a pregnant woman in her third trimester). Refugees with children may be eligible for TANF and may receive assistance for up to 12 months to five years, depending on the state.<sup>2</sup> Like other TANF recipients, refugees may be subject to work requirements and participate in employment services.
- **The Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program** serves adult refugees who meet the income eligibility requirements for TANF but do not have dependent minor children. They can receive RCA benefits for a maximum of eight months after arriving in the country. RCA recipients receive employment services through other ORR-funded programs. In most states, state public assistance agencies administer the RCA program. In about one-third of states, RCA is administered by either resettlement agencies or partnerships between public agencies and resettlement agencies.

## Key Findings

### Administration of Cash Assistance

- **Most states require TANF-eligible refugees to apply for benefits at local public assistance offices; application locations for the RCA Program are more varied.** In most states, TANF-eligible refugees apply for assistance at the local public assistance agency; this is true in all eight study sites. Refugees either follow the same TANF application procedures as non-refugees (in 29 of the 48 states, as reported by SRCs responding to the relevant survey question) or are served by a specialized unit whose

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<sup>1</sup> Other populations are eligible for the same programs and services for which refugees are eligible, including TANF/RCA, medical and food assistance, and employment and social services. These other populations include asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, Amerasians, and victims of a severe form of trafficking. This report uses the term *refugee* to apply to all the populations eligible for refugee services. Some do not go through a resettlement process and therefore do not receive R&P services, but may nonetheless receive help from the resettlement agencies in connecting with public benefits and services.

<sup>2</sup> Adults may receive federally funded TANF benefits for no more than five years in a lifetime. States may use their own funds to provide assistance for longer than five years and federal TANF funds to support up to 20 percent of the caseload beyond five years. Some states have adopted time limits shorter than five years.

staff understand the refugee eligibility rules (in at least some areas of 13 states). Only four SRC respondents reported that TANF-eligible refugees in their state apply for assistance at the resettlement agencies. RCA-eligible refugees also apply for assistance at the public assistance agency in the majority of states, but more states allow them to apply for benefits at resettlement agencies (13 states, including three of the study sites).

- **There are several challenges associated with refugees applying for and receiving cash assistance, both TANF and RCA.** Because refugees are usually a small part of their caseloads, public assistance agency staff may be unaware or unfamiliar with the refugee resettlement process and refugee-specific issues, including the state's public assistance policies for refugees. Application processes and program rules are challenging for refugees to navigate at a time when they are still becoming acclimated to U.S. systems. Further, communication between public assistance agency staff and newly arrived refugees is complicated by language barriers and cultural differences.
- **Sites have devised a number of innovative strategies to deal with these challenges.** They include public assistance agencies operating specialized units for refugees, whose staff are familiar with refugee-specific rules and issues; co-locating TANF eligibility staff at resettlement agencies to reduce the burdens of the application process on refugees; and conducting cross-trainings between resettlement agency and public agency staff.

### Provision of Employment Services

- **Both TANF and RCA require work-eligible recipients of cash assistance to participate in work-related activities.** Most states apply the same TANF work requirements to TANF-receiving refugees as they do to non-refugees, but 5 of the 48 SRCs responding to that survey question reported that refugees in their state are subject to different work requirements for at least the first six months of assistance. For example, one study site applies the requirements differently for refugees, allowing those with limited English skills to take ESL classes full-time for their first two months in the United States.
- **Both TANF and RCA staff interviewed report that sanctions on refugees for noncompliance with work requirements are rare.** Staff in some sites reported they were a little more lenient in imposing sanctions on refugees receiving TANF than for other TANF recipients—especially during the first month after resettlement—because refugees were unfamiliar with the TANF program rules and requirements. In one site, staff speculated that refugees generally are more compliant with the rules than the typical TANF recipient. Sanctions for noncompliance with RCA's work requirements are also rare because RCA benefits are short in duration, and RCA providers depend on employment service providers to inform them about noncompliance.
- **RCA recipients and many TANF recipients receive refugee-specific employment services, but in some locations TANF-receiving refugees receive employment services alongside non-refugees.** RCA recipients access employment services funded

by ORR programs. These services are refugee specific and often provided by organizations that specialize in serving refugees. Refugees receiving TANF access employment services provided either in house at public assistance agencies or through private organizations the agencies contract with to provide welfare-to-work services. Some TANF agencies, including in five of the eight study sites, contract with refugee-serving organizations (RSOs) to provide specialized employment services to refugees. In other locations, including three of the eight study sites, refugees participate in the same employment services as non-refugees.

- **Refugees are a heterogeneous group with a wide range of skills, education, and experience, which presents a challenge for employment service providers.** Refugees have a wide range of skills and education, requiring different services and approaches to best serve different groups. Some refugees come to the United States with little to no formal education and little relevant work experience, whereas other refugees arrive with professional degrees and certifications. Refugees with professional backgrounds hope to return to the work they had been doing, but their credentials may not be recognized in this country. On the other end of the spectrum, refugees with very low levels of education may have difficulty getting even entry-level jobs.
- **Providers have developed a number of different employment services strategies for serving refugees.** Employment services for refugees typically combine job readiness assistance and English language instruction. Job development for refugees is often more intensive than is typical in general TANF employment services programs. Some programs, including in at least two of the eight study sites, have developed specialized programs for high-skilled refugees and those with professional certifications from their home country, such as re-credentialing programs to help refugees obtain U.S. certifications.

### Coordination and Integration Strategies

- **Agencies and organizations serving refugees have taken a variety of steps to facilitate coordination and communication across programs or to integrate their own programs internally.** Coordination and integration strategies aim to ensure refugees can receive the full range of services for which they are eligible and that will help them obtain employment and achieve self-sufficiency. Strategies observed among the eight study sites that facilitate coordination include creating specialized units or designated points of contact with resettlement agencies within public assistance agencies, co-locating staff on site at partner agencies, and establishing regular cross-program stakeholder meetings on refugee services and issues. Strategies that integrate multiple programs within one agency include arranging for resettlement agencies to administer RCA (possible in states following alternative RCA models) or to serve as employment services providers under RCA and/or TANF.

## Refugee Program Data and Data Systems

- **Data exist that could help researchers and program administrators better understand the effectiveness of strategies for serving refugees, but the nature of the data and the types of systems in which they are stored vary by state.** As a result, researchers cannot use a one-size-fits-all approach to obtain data on refugee cash assistance and employment services from states. Nonetheless, some common general characteristics of the systems that agencies and RSOs use may allow researchers a general roadmap for exploring data availability.

## 1. Introduction

Refugees are people who fled their home country to escape persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>3</sup> Refugees resettled in the United States come from a wide range of countries and bring a diverse set of education and skills. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, approximately 54,000 refugees (down from 85,000 refugees in FY 2016) arrived from 77 different countries, with 40 percent coming from South Asia and 38 percent from Africa. Since 1975, more than three million refugees have resettled in the United States.<sup>4</sup>

Those fortunate to be resettled receive safe haven but need considerable assistance as they learn English, find employment, and acclimate to a new culture. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, finances a number of critical resources for newly resettled refugees with the aim of helping them become economically self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Refugees without dependent minor children receive financial support from ORR's Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program during their early months here. Refugees with dependent minor children may be eligible to receive financial support from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant program, through ACF's Office of Family Assistance. In addition to providing cash assistance, ORR and TANF programs fund an array of employment and social services to support newly arrived refugees provided by a variety of entities—resettlement agencies, public assistance agencies, ethnic community-based organizations (ECBOs), faith-based organizations, and schools.

### 1.1 Study Purpose

States have broad flexibility in implementing TANF and RCA programs and the related employment services, and as a result programs vary by state. The programs' distinct policies and administration make it challenging to coordinate services and systematically collect data on refugee service receipt. While refugees make up a small proportion of the TANF population, their needs are unique and often require more intensive and culturally appropriate services. Given resettlement agencies' and refugee-serving organizations' (RSOs') experience working with refugees, coordination and collaboration between the TANF and RCA programs and these organizations may be critical to ensuring appropriate services are provided to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency in a relatively short time frame.

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<sup>3</sup> This report uses the term *refugee* to refer to all populations eligible for U.S. refugee services, as described in the text box **Defining “Refugees” as Including Other Populations Served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)** on page 6. For the full legal definition of *refugee*, see section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, available here <https://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/refugees-asylum>.

<sup>4</sup> *Source:* Refugee Admissions Report as of September 30, 2017. <http://www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/>.

Little is known about how the various systems that assist refugees collaborate to promote common goals of self-sufficiency and employment, and how refugees' experiences might differ depending on the structure of the state (or local) program. To better understand how financial supports and employment services are provided to refugees, ACF contracted with Abt Associates and its partner MEF Associates to conduct a study on the intersection between TANF and RCA services.

The study's main purpose is to learn how state and local systems serve refugees through TANF and RCA, how state and program-level staff coordinate the delivery of services provided to refugees, and how TANF and RCA programs and practices aim to foster positive employment outcomes and refugee self-sufficiency. In addition, this study explores the availability of existing data that could be analyzed to better understand refugee services under both programs.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The study was guided by four research questions:

- What do we know about how different states and local sites (e.g., counties) administer benefits and services for refugees through TANF and RCA?
- Are there innovative strategies being implemented to help refugees obtain employment and ultimately achieve economic self-sufficiency in the United States?
- To what extent and in what ways are states integrating or coordinating TANF, RCA, and associated services to better serve the diverse needs of the refugees?
- What data are currently collected by states, local sites, and service providers regarding refugee services and their self-sufficiency outcomes?

## 1.3 Study Methods and Components

The following activities were undertaken to obtain a wide range of information about how states and local sites serve refugees and coordinate services with community partners:

- **Consultations with non-federal experts and federal program staff**—The research team sought input from a panel of researchers, policymakers, and program operators with expertise in refugee policy, social service delivery systems, TANF- and RCA-affiliated services, and employment and training programs targeting newly arrived refugees.

- **Online survey of State Refugee Coordinators (SRCs)**—The research team conducted an online survey of SRCs in January 2016 to systematically document the diversity of state policies and practices across the country, and inform selection of sites for visits.<sup>5</sup>
- **Site visits to eight local sites serving refugees**—The research team conducted site visits to eight sites in 2016, which involved in-depth interviews with managers and frontline staff of local public assistance agencies, local resettlement agencies, and community-based organizations (CBOs). The team also conducted focus groups with newly arrived refugees in each site.<sup>6</sup>

Much of the findings in this report come from data collected during the visits to the eight sites, which were selected after a review of responses to the SRC survey and available federal data on refugees resettled in various geographical areas. The research team considered sites with a diverse array of program features and refugee characteristics, including national origin, education, and skill levels. These eight sites were selected because they serve large numbers of refugees, and in some cases, experts noted that they were operating well-run programs that might offer innovative strategies worth sharing. Though they are diverse on a number of dimensions, the eight sites were not selected to be representative of how refugees are served across the United States.

## 1.4 State and Local Context

Exhibit 1 presents characteristics of the eight sites selected for visits. Seven sites were counties; the eighth, in Michigan, comprised two neighboring counties. The eight sites differed across several dimensions. First, they represented three different models of RCA administration, which is discussed in chapter 2. Second, sites served refugees from a wide range of countries, including sizable numbers from Iraq, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Burma, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Somalia, and Cuba. Third, the size of refugee populations differed across sites; however, all sites had large enough refugee populations and refugee programs to generate lessons relevant for those programs that serve the most refugees.

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<sup>5</sup> The online survey was administered to the SRCs in 49 states (Wyoming has no refugee program) plus the District of Columbia and California's San Diego County (which operates a refugee program separate from the rest of the state). Of the SRCs who received the survey, 49 responded, for a response rate of 96 percent.

<sup>6</sup> Additional information on the sites visited can be found in Appendix A. Information on the focus groups, including number of participants and their countries of origin, can be found in Appendix B. Quotations in this report reflect focus group participants' experiences.



**Exhibit 1: Characteristics of Sites Selected for Visits (FY 2015)**

Community	RCA Program Model <sup>a</sup>	Newly Arrived Refugees <sup>b</sup>	National Origin of Newly Arrived Refugees (3 Largest)
Arapahoe County, CO	Wilson-Fish	621	Burma (31%) Iraq (15%) DRC (13%)
Cook County, IL	State-administered	1,769	Burma (31%) Iraq (25%) DRC (10%)
Fairfax County, VA	State-administered	618	Afghanistan (48%) Iraq (25%) Iran (11%)
Franklin County, OH	State-administered	1,406	Somalia (31%) Bhutan (27%) Iraq (15%)
Jefferson County, KY	Wilson-Fish	2,239	Cuba (47%) Somalia (12%) Iraq (10%)
King County, WA	State-administered	1,971	Iraq (18%) Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (18%) Somalia (15%)
Montgomery County, MD	Public-Private Partnership	990	Ethiopia (21%) Afghanistan (18%) Iraq (11%)
Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI	State-administered	1,278	Iraq (91%) Syria (6%) Iran (1%)

Source: FY 2015, ORR Served Populations by State, County and Country of Origin. Data provided by ORR on September 14, 2016.

**Notes:**

a. States vary in how they administer RCA services. The three models are described in section 2.2.2.

b. As reflected in 8 U.S. Code § 1101(a)(42)(A), a refugee is “any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”

The demographics of the counties included in this study are important context in understanding the range of challenges, including the cost of living and social isolation refugees face in those communities. As detailed in Appendix C, at the time of our visits, the county populations varied on a number of dimensions:

- The counties of Cook, Fairfax, King, and Montgomery had significantly higher percentages of residents who were foreign born, ranging from 21 percent to 33 percent; the average in the United States is 13 percent. Refugees may feel more accepted in counties that have a diverse population.<sup>7</sup>
- Fairfax and Montgomery, two affluent counties outside of the District of Columbia, had median household incomes of \$113,000 and \$99,000, respectively, about twice as high as the U.S. median of \$54,000. The high incomes affect living expenses, which may lead to greater challenges for refugees becoming self-sufficient.<sup>8</sup>
- In contrast, Cook, Franklin, and Jefferson Counties had percentages of residents living below the poverty level (16, 17, and 15 percent, respectively) that were higher compared with the other counties in the study and the U.S. average of 13 percent.<sup>9</sup>
- Finally, the unemployment rate was relatively low (under the U.S. average of 5.3 percent) in all counties except Cook and Macomb, at 6.2 and 5.8 percent, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.5 Descriptions of Sections in the Report

The organization of the remainder of this report is as follows:

- **Chapter 2**—the array of services provided to refugees.
- **Chapter 3**—how cash assistance is delivered to refugees, and the variation between the TANF and RCA programs and by state.
- **Chapter 4**—how employment services are delivered to refugees, and the variation by program and by state.
- **Chapter 5**—how public assistance agencies and organizations that serve refugees specifically coordinate the delivery of services.
- **Chapter 6**—what types of data refugee service providers collect, and the data systems in which these data are maintained.
- **Chapter 7**—the challenges and innovative strategies identified across sites and suggestions for further research.

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<sup>7</sup> *Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>8</sup> *Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates.

<sup>9</sup> *Source:* U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> *Source:* Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2015.

## 2. Background on Refugee Services

“Refugees” are individuals and families unable to live in their home country “because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.”<sup>11</sup> The text box **Populations Served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)** (below) describes the groups that qualify for ORR services. For ease of reference, this report generally uses the term *refugees* to refer to all of them.

Refugees resettled in the United States receive assistance from a network of national and local organizations that includes public assistance agencies, workforce development agencies, and RSOs, resettlement agencies, and other community-based organizations that specialize in serving refugees,<sup>12</sup> as well as from schools and colleges. The sections below provide an overview of the resettlement process and the cash assistance, employment, and social services available to recently resettled refugees.

### Populations Served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)

This report generally uses the term *refugee* to refer not only to individuals meeting the Immigration and Nationality Act’s legal definition, but also to other populations eligible for U.S. refugee services:

- **Asylees**—individuals who enter the United States or arrive at a port of entry without refugee status but who are found after arrival to meet the definition of a refugee.
- **Cuban/Haitian entrants**—nationals of Cuba or Haiti who are granted parole status as a Cuban or Haitian entrant, or are in removal proceedings, or have an application for asylum pending.
- **Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders**—individuals from Iraq and Afghanistan who assisted the U.S. government or U.S. military forces overseas. The Department of State grants them SIV status overseas and then the Department of Homeland Security approves them for admission to the United States.
- **Amerasians**—persons fathered by a U.S. citizen and born in Vietnam after January 1, 1962, and before January 1, 1976. Amerasians are eligible for ORR refugee benefits and services beginning on the date of their entry into the United States.
- **Victims of a severe form of trafficking**—individuals subjected to sex trafficking or labor trafficking.

### 2.1 Overview of Refugee Resettlement Process

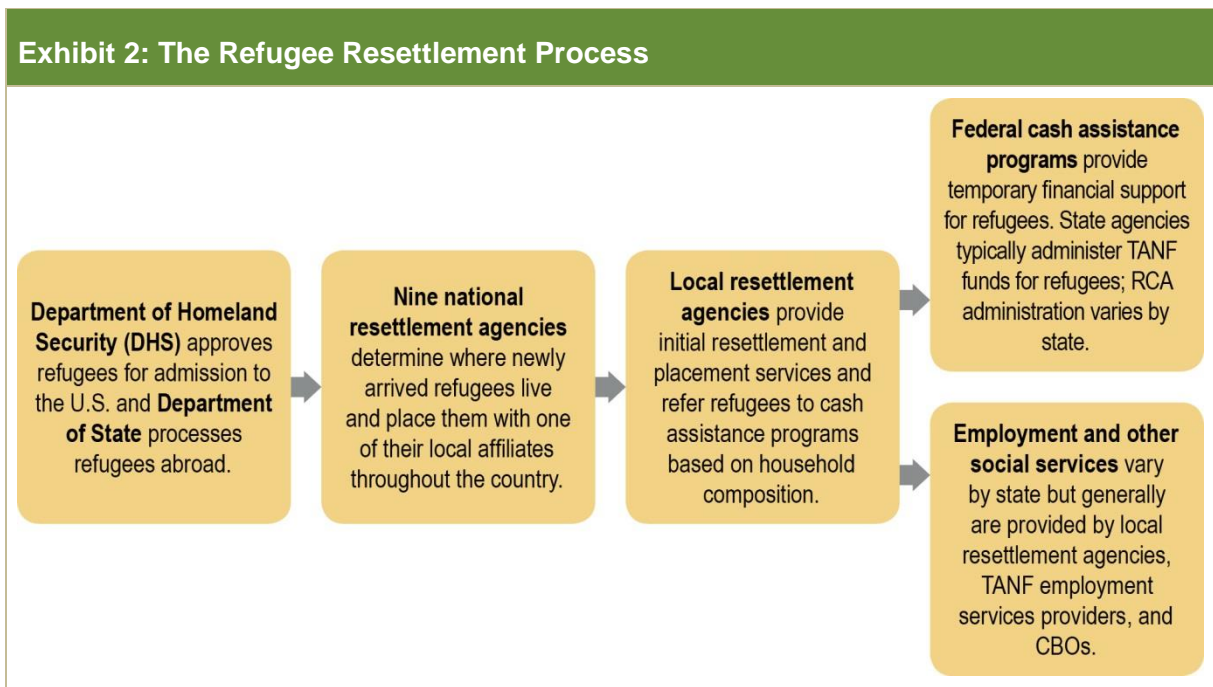
People who have fled their home country for safety in another can be given “refugee” status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and referred to a third country willing to accept them. Exhibit 2 summarizes the general sequence of events in the refugee

<sup>11</sup> For the complete Immigration and Nationality Act definition, see 8 U.S. Code § 1101(a)(42)(A).

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix A for the list of organizations providing services to refugees in each of the study sites.

resettlement process after refugees are referred to the United States, including the benefits and services provided along each step of the process.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security approves refugees for admission to the United States based on interviews and other evidence, including security checks. Once approved, refugees are processed while still overseas by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Upon arrival in the United States, refugees initially are assisted by local affiliates of nine national resettlement agencies that have cooperative agreements with the State Department specifying the assistance to be provided.<sup>13</sup> These local affiliates use funds from the State Department’s Reception and Placement (R&P) Program to provide services during the initial 30 to 90 days that refugees are in the country.



During the R&P phase, local resettlement agencies assist refugees with applying for a Social Security number, medical assistance (through Medicaid or ORR’s Refugee Medical Assistance), and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, as appropriate.<sup>14</sup> The agencies help families secure

*“They took us to an office to apply for Social Security and also helped my daughter get admitted to a school.”*

<sup>13</sup> These nine national agencies are Church World Service; Episcopal Migration Ministries; Ethiopian Community Development Council; Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society; International Rescue Committee; Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants; and World Relief Corporation.




<sup>14</sup> Asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, Amerasians, and victims of a severe form of trafficking are not eligible for R&P services. Cuban/Haitian entrants may be eligible for the Department of Homeland Security’s Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program which provides certain initial benefits and services.

housing, register any children for school, access services such as physical and mental health screenings, and provide assistance with expenses such as rent, furnishings, clothing, and food.<sup>15</sup> The local agencies also help eligible refugees apply for public cash assistance through a few different programs. These programs, and the differences between them, are described in more detail later in this chapter and in Chapter 3.

Refugees resettled in all states (except Wyoming, which does not administer a refugee program) may access all programs and services for which they are eligible. However, states have broad flexibility to structure and administer those programs and services. During R&P, resettlement caseworkers explain the programs and application processes to refugees. All TANF and RCA recipients are expected to participate in employment-related services, unless exempt due to physical or mental health challenges. These employment-related services include self-sufficiency activities such as job readiness workshops, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and support services such as assistance obtaining work-related documentation, transportation to employment activities, and translation or interpretation services.

## 2.2 Cash Assistance

This section discusses in more detail the three cash assistance programs for which refugees arriving in the United States may be eligible: TANF, RCA, and Matching Grant, as summarized in Exhibit 3.

Exhibit 3: Cash Assistance Programs Available to Refugees		
Program	Which refugees are eligible?	For how long?
 <p><b>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)</b></p>	Refugee families with <b>at least one dependent minor child in the United States</b>	Up to 5 years of benefits total, but varies by state*
 <p><b>Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)</b></p>	Adult refugees who meet the income eligibility requirements for TANF but are not eligible because they are an <b>individual or couple without a dependent minor child</b>	Up to 8 months from arrival in U.S.
 <p><b>Matching Grant</b></p>	At least one member of the case must be employable in order to be enrolled	180 days from date of eligibility

\* Adults may receive federally funded TANF benefits for no more than five years in a lifetime. States may use their own funds to provide assistance for longer than five years and federal TANF funds to support up to 20 percent of the caseload beyond five years. Some states have adopted time limits shorter than five years.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to federal dollars, local resettlement agencies use funds received from individual and corporate donations, foundations, and faith-based organizations to provide these services.

### 2.2.1 Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

TANF provides cash assistance and other benefits for low-income families with at least one dependent minor child (or a pregnant woman in her third trimester) and is not refugee specific. States administer programs using their federal block grant (through ACF's Office of Family Assistance) and state maintenance-of-effort (MOE) funds.<sup>16</sup> The funding is used to provide cash assistance and employment services to recipients, as well as a variety of other activities that meet one of the four purposes of TANF:<sup>17</sup>

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes;
2. Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

States and counties administer TANF benefits to families and have broad authority to determine income eligibility thresholds, benefit levels, benefit duration, and sanction policies for recipients who do not follow program requirements. Federal TANF funds may not be used for a family with an adult who has received assistance for 60 months, though some states use state funds or the law's hardship exemption to provide assistance beyond that period.<sup>18</sup> Many states have also established state-specific shorter time limits, with one as low as 12 months.

In addition to cash assistance, TANF programs provide adult recipients with case management and employment services to help them attain self-sufficiency. While receiving services, adult recipients are expected to engage in work activities for a specified average number of hours each week (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

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<sup>16</sup> Under the TANF MOE requirement, a state must spend at least 80 percent (75 percent if the state meets certain performance standards) of the amount it spent on related programs in fiscal year 1994, before TANF was created. Funds must be used for benefits and services for needy families. Noncompliant states face a reduction in their federal TANF block grant.

<sup>17</sup> In fiscal year 2016, states spent, on average, about 24 percent of federal TANF and state MOE funds on cash assistance and 9 percent on work, education, and training activities. *Sources:* <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/tanf-financial-data-fy-2016> and <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/about>.

<sup>18</sup> The hardship exemption allows states to extend assistance beyond 60 months for a limited number of families who have experienced hardship, as defined by the state, or where a family member has been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty, as defined by federal law. *Source:* The Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database, funded by HHS/ACF and HHS/ASPE.

SRCs reported on the survey challenges for refugees living in areas where TANF benefit

*"I think we need more financial assistance. Transportation is not cheap and we often spend our money on purchasing items that are not covered by food stamps. We are constantly told to try to save the money we get from cash assistance."*

levels are low relative to the local cost of living. In particular, a significant number of SRCs (31 of 48 responding to the question) report that the lack of affordable housing is a serious challenge for refugees. Similarly, during site visits, State Refugee Coordinators, local public assistance agency staff, and refugees reported challenges where the local cost of living is high, as TANF benefit levels have not adjusted with the rising cost of living in many states.

The text box below provides more information about some of these challenges and how they affect service delivery.

### The High Cost of Housing Creates Challenges for Refugees

The lack of affordable housing near jobs creates challenges for refugees who rely on public transportation and commute long distances. These challenges are exacerbated when public transportation is not available during the hours when many refugees commute to low-skill jobs.

Resettlement agency staff have taken various steps to address high housing costs. In two sites, refugees are placed temporarily in hotels or motels. In many sites, refugees are housed in neighboring counties, including locations with long commutes to employers, service providers, and resettlement agencies.

In Montgomery County (MD), for example, refugees initially must travel from their homes in a neighboring county to meet with public assistance agency staff and employment services providers. After completing their initial eight months on TANF with caseworkers co-located with resettlement agencies, refugees are transferred to case managers at TANF offices local to them. In the Oakland/Macomb (MI) area, movement between counties as refugees find affordable housing reportedly leads to delays in the verification and approval of their TANF applications because TANF benefits must be approved by the county where refugees reside.

## 2.2.2 Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA)

Funded by ORR, the RCA program provides assistance to adult refugees ineligible for TANF or Supplemental Security Income.<sup>19</sup> Adults can receive RCA benefits for a maximum of eight months after arriving in the United States.<sup>20</sup> All employable (non-exempt) RCA recipients are required to register with employability services providers and engage in work activities.

States provide RCA, case management, employment services, and other services to refugees through one of three refugee resettlement models. Exhibit 4 shows the model that

<sup>19</sup> Supplemental Security Income provides cash assistance to low-income individuals who have disabilities or are 65 or older.

<sup>20</sup> For asylees, Cuban/Haitian entrants, and certified victims of human trafficking, eligibility is based on when they obtain legal status, not their physical arrival in the United States.

operates in each state.<sup>21</sup> Within each model, states vary in how they implement services, which in turn affects the services provided to refugees.<sup>22</sup>

- **State-administered.** In this model, ORR-funded RCA benefits and self-sufficiency programs are administered through the state public assistance agency. RCA benefit levels are typically based on the state's TANF benefit levels for a household of the same size. As of January 2016, there were 33 states with state-administered programs.
- **Wilson-Fish.** ORR provides grants directly to public or private nonprofit organizations to administer the refugee program. As of January 2016 12 states and one county (San Diego) participate in the Wilson-Fish program. In most Wilson-Fish states, resettlement agencies serve as nonprofit grantees and administer ORR-funded RCA benefits directly without involvement of the state agency. In a few Wilson-Fish states, a state agency serves as the grantee and administers RCA benefits. Wilson-Fish grants include RCA, employment services, case management, other social services, and in some cases, medical assistance. Unlike state-administered programs, Wilson-Fish grantees can establish RCA benefit levels that exceed the state's TANF benefit levels for a household of the same size.<sup>23</sup>
- **Public-Private Partnership.** Under this model, local resettlement agencies may provide cash assistance and services, and the state agency provides policy and administrative oversight. Like Wilson-Fish, under this model the ORR-funded RCA benefit levels may exceed TANF benefit levels for a family of the same size. As of January 2016, five state agencies partnered with private resettlement agencies to administer RCA.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Exhibit 4 reflects the distribution of state resettlement models when the SRC survey was administered in January 2016. At that time, refugee programs operated in all states but Wyoming. As of this report (November 2017), Kansas, Maine, and New Jersey no longer operate state-administered programs, and Texas no longer operates a Public-Private Partnership program. ORR-funded programs in these states are administered by Replacement Designees authorized by the Director of ORR (per 45 CFR 400.301).

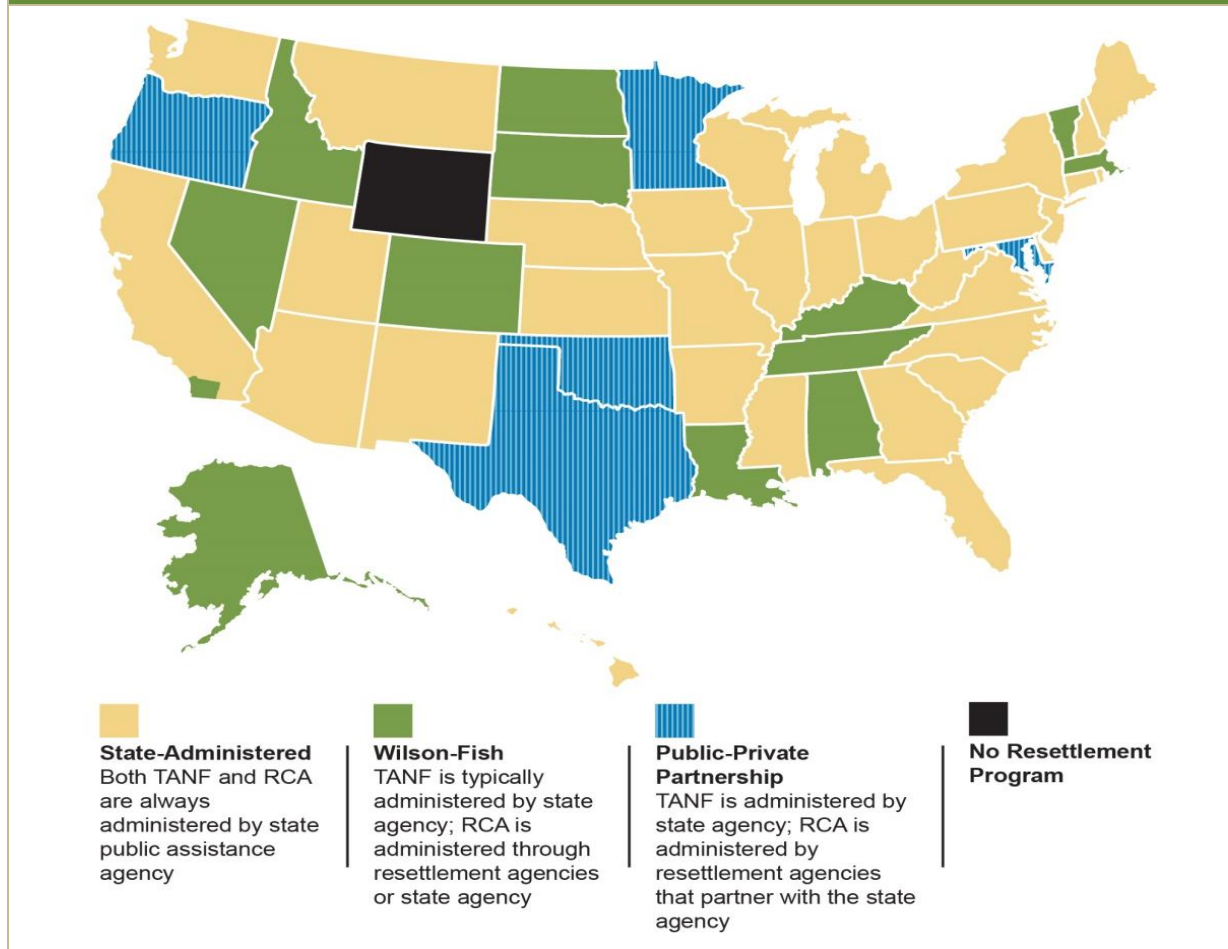
<sup>22</sup> Throughout this report, "states" is used as a collective term to refer to both states and the state-alternative entities operating some Wilson-Fish programs.

<sup>23</sup> When RCA benefits exceed TANF benefits for a family of the same size, states can choose to use Wilson-Fish grant funds to provide a TANF differential payment equal to the difference between the TANF and RCA benefit levels, which TANF-eligible refugees receive for the first eight months upon entry into the United States. More information on the Wilson-Fish program is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/wilson-fish-alternative-program-guidelines>.

<sup>24</sup> In 2016, Texas, which had been a Public-Private Partnership, withdrew from the refugee resettlement program. In 2017, ORR selected four Regional Replacement Designees to administer RCA in that state.



Exhibit 4: Refugee Assistance Program Models, by State, as of January 2016



*Note:* Shown as of January 2016. Since then, Kansas, Maine, and New Jersey no longer administer state-administered programs, and Texas no longer administers a Public-Private Partnership program.

Some states opt out of the state-administered program model in favor of the Wilson-Fish or Public-Private Partnership model because they believe the resettlement agencies are in a better position to provide and coordinate the wide array of services that refugees need to become self-sufficient. RSOs understand the policies pertaining to refugees, have more context on the needs of refugees, and have staff or interpreters who speak the refugees' languages and are better able to communicate with them. Wilson-Fish and Public-Private Partnership models also allow states more flexibility with some features of their programs.

### 2.2.3 Matching Grant

An alternative to TANF or RCA is ORR's Matching Grant program. Under the Matching Grant program, resettlement agencies provide services such as case management, employment services, and a cash allowance with the goal that new refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency within 180 days—without accessing TANF or RCA. Refugees participating in the Matching Grant program still may be eligible to receive SNAP and medical assistance through Medicaid or Refugee Medical Assistance.

Although not a central focus of this study, the Matching Grant program is considered an alternative to public cash assistance and the program's eligibility requirements are different from TANF's and RCA's. However, interviewees during the site visits frequently mentioned Matching Grant because eligibility and placement in the program are often determined at the same time as TANF and RCA eligibility determinations.

## 2.3 Employment Services

The employment services<sup>25</sup> available to refugees receiving cash assistance depend on which program provides their cash assistance.

- **TANF.** States use state and federal block grant funding to provide employment services to TANF participants, including refugees. Like other TANF recipients, refugees are expected to participate in work activities while they are receiving assistance or risk being sanctioned. Some refugees may access employment services funded through other sources on their own; these services may count towards their TANF work requirement if they report the activity to their case manager.
- **RCA.** RCA rules require employable refugees receiving such assistance to participate in work activities. They are usually referred to RSOs that receive funding through other ORR programs to provide employability services (i.e., services designed to help refugees obtain jobs soon after enrollment in the program), as well as social integration/adjustment services designed to address barriers to employment. The text box **Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Program Services** on page 14 describes the range of services provided.
- **Matching Grant.** Refugees receiving cash assistance from the Matching Grant program typically receive employment services directly from their resettlement agency as part of the program.

Refugees without dependent minor children and who are not currently receiving cash assistance (e.g., because they have exceeded their eight months of RCA eligibility) may be able to receive employment services funded by other ORR programs if they are within their first five years in the United States.

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<sup>25</sup> Throughout this document, the term *employment services* is used to refer to the range of employment and training, including employability, services that refugees receive.

## Refugee Social Services (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Program Services

States and alternative programs that resettle refugees receive Refugee Social Services (RSS) funding from ORR, and counties that serve large numbers of refugees receive additional funding from ORR's Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) program, which allocates funding to states based on refugee arrivals. RSS and TAG programs provide services to refugees for up to five years from arrival, with priority given to recent arrivals and the ultimate goal of helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency. ORR also awards competitive discretionary grants to support special employment-related initiatives and to otherwise address unmet refugee employment needs.

Services that may be provided through RSS- and TAG-funded programs can be grouped into three categories:

### Employability Services

- Development of employability plan
- Job development, job referral, job search, placement, and follow-up
- Employability assessment services, including aptitude and skills testing
- On-the-job training
- English language instruction
- Short-term vocational training (less than one year), including driver's education

### Support Services

- Skills recertification
- Assistance in obtaining work-related documentation
- Child care for children whose parents are participating in employability services or are employed
- Transportation, when necessary for participation in employability services
- Translation or interpreter services related to employment or employability services
- Employment-focused case management

### Integration/Adjustment Services

- Information, referral, and outreach to facilitate refugees' access to available services
- Citizenship and naturalization preparation
- Child care and transportation to support participation in other than employability services
- Translation, interpretation, and case management for other than employability services

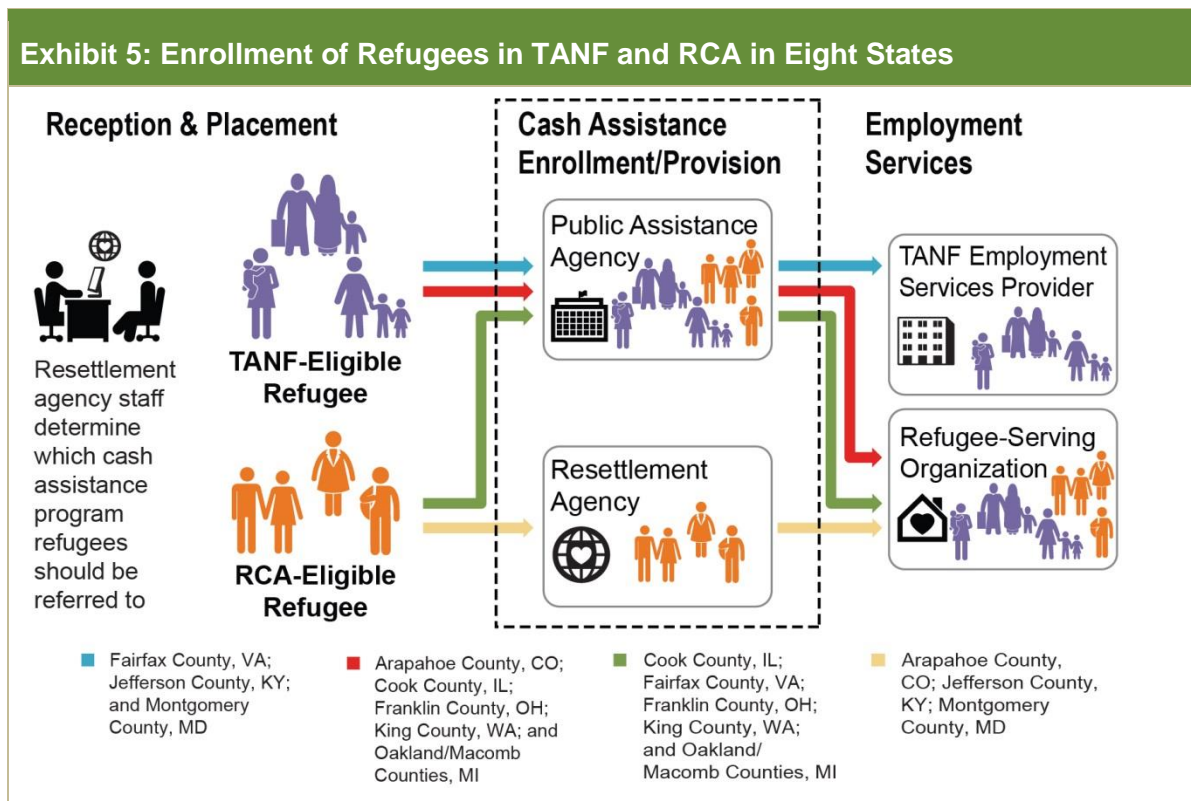
Additional social services are available to refugees, largely through resettlement agencies and RSOs, including help scheduling doctors' appointments, help with housing issues, or help with other crises.

Sources: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/synthesisoffindingsfromthreesites.pdf> and <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/matching-grants>

### 3. Administration of Cash Assistance

As previously mentioned, refugees first connect with cash assistance programs as part of their R&P services. R&P caseworkers meet with newly arrived refugees to determine which cash assistance program they should be referred to based on household composition, income, assets, and other criteria. The next step—applying for cash assistance—differs from state to state and by program.

Exhibit 5 depicts the variations in pathways across the eight study sites for refugees applying for cash assistance and receiving employment services. This chapter describes the pathway from R&P to cash assistance enrollment/provision (i.e., application and eligibility determination); Chapter 4 describes the pathway from cash assistance enrollment/provision to employment services.



As indicated in Exhibit 5, cash assistance enrollment for TANF-eligible refugees takes place at the public assistance agency in all eight sites (as indicated by the red and blue arrows). Cash assistance enrollment for RCA-eligible refugees, however, might take place at the public assistance agency or at the resettlement agency, depending on the state. In the five sites with state-administered programs (Cook County, IL; Fairfax County, VA; Franklin County, OH; King County, WA; and Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI), the public assistance agency enrolls refugees in RCA and provides the cash assistance payment, as indicated by the green arrow. In the remaining three sites, the local resettlement agency provides RCA,

through its Wilson-Fish program (Arapahoe County, CO; Jefferson County, KY) or its Public-Private Partnership (Montgomery County, MD), as indicated by the beige arrow.<sup>26</sup>

The following sections provide a high-level overview of the application process for TANF and RCA, followed by a discussion of challenges encountered in administering these programs for refugees.

### 3.1 Application Process for TANF

Nationwide, local public assistance agency staff determine TANF eligibility for refugees.

- In 29 of the 48 states whose SRCs responded to the relevant question on the survey (including four states containing study sites—KY, OH, VA, WA), refugees follow the same TANF application procedures as non-refugees, applying for assistance at the local public assistance agency, either in person or online. According to those SRCs, this model offers the benefits of coordination with other social and health service programs (e.g., SNAP, Medicaid, child care), accessibility statewide (in areas where few or no local resettlement agencies operate), and ease of data tracking and reporting.
- Nine of the responding states (including three states containing study sites—CO, IL, MI) operate specialized units within the local public assistance office whose staff understand the refugee eligibility rules and may be multilingual.<sup>27</sup> SRCs in these states reported that this model enables refugees to meet with staff who are familiar with the resettlement process. Further, refugees who do not qualify for TANF can be easily enrolled into RCA at the local public assistance office by staff who understand the RCA program.
- In four states, the process varies by locality. For example, areas of the state that have the largest refugee populations may have specialized units, whereas other areas may process refugees along with other TANF applicants.
- In four states (including one containing a study site—MD), state public assistance agencies co-locate TANF eligibility staff at local resettlement agencies to process refugees' applications.<sup>28</sup>
- In two states, local resettlement agency staff rely heavily on the Matching Grant program due to the low TANF benefit rates in the states (see the text box **Matching Grant Program Administration** on page 17 for details).

*“Having people who speak the same language is really helpful; otherwise we would have been lost.”*

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<sup>26</sup> Appendix D depicts the four primary pathways for refugees applying for and receiving cash assistance (and employment services) across the eight sites.

<sup>27</sup> At the time of the site visit, Jefferson County was considering reinstating a specialized unit to work with immigrants and refugees with limited English proficiency.

<sup>28</sup> Three of these states use a Wilson-Fish model; one uses a Public-Private Partnership model.

The TANF application process can be particularly challenging for refugees served by public assistance agencies that do not have specialized units or co-located staff due to language and literacy issues, difficulty navigating online application processes, and fulfilling certain eligibility requirements, including mandatory job search requirements.

### Matching Grant Program Administration

Resettlement agencies administer ORR's Matching Grant program to provide temporary cash assistance to refugees, who are expected to become economically self-sufficient within 180 days.

Though refugees ultimately decide whether the program is the right choice for them, in all eight study sites, resettlement agency staff suggest the Matching Grant option to families who show a strong desire to work and are likely to become self-sufficient quickly. In Jefferson County (KY), staff meet regularly to discuss the current and expected caseload to determine which cases are a good fit for the program. In Arapahoe County (CO), staff discourage families with advanced education from the Matching Grant option due to the significant time it takes to obtain U.S. credentials and employment commensurate with past experience.\*

\*The Matching Grant program is often used to provide services for refugees with higher levels of education.

## 3.2 Application Process for RCA

Across the states surveyed, RCA eligibility determination and enrollment are more commonly conducted at resettlement agencies than they are for TANF, with exceptions being a function of each state's refugee resettlement model.

Of the 49 states whose SRC responded to the survey:

- Twenty-one (21) states require RCA applicants to apply for benefits at a local public assistance office.
- In 13 states, RCA-eligible refugees apply for benefits at resettlement agencies.
- In 11 states, they apply through specialized units within local public assistance offices where language is not a barrier.

While the RCA application process is typically less challenging for refugees than applying for TANF, language barriers leading to difficulties completing paperwork and communicating with eligibility staff may persist when it occurs at the local TANF office.

## 3.3 Challenges in Administering Cash Assistance to Refugees

Several challenges are associated with refugees applying for and receiving cash assistance, affecting both TANF-eligible and RCA-eligible refugees. Sites have devised a number of innovative strategies to overcome them.

***Public assistance agency staff lack knowledge of refugee processes and policies.***

Given the small refugee caseload at most public assistance agencies, public agency staff often are unfamiliar with the refugee resettlement process and refugee-specific issues, including the state's public cash assistance policies for refugees. Local communities have adopted the following strategies to improve their ability to serve refugees:

- Many local public assistance offices operate specialized units for refugees, a model that fosters staff familiarity with refugee-specific policies as well as the special challenges refugees often face.
- Some communities have established regular meetings among organizations and agencies that serve refugees, including the resettlement agencies and the local public assistance agency. For example, some meetings have included cross-training between resettlement agency and public assistance agency staff to alleviate confusion around policies and requirements for both TANF and RCA programs.
- Many public assistance agencies—including three study sites—Arapahoe (CO), Cook (IL), and Oakland/Macomb (MI)—have designated a single point of contact to answer questions from resettlement agency caseworkers. This helps streamline communication, ensures that resettlement agency staff are working with someone familiar with the unique needs of refugees, and facilitates resolution of case-specific issues.

***Refugees are overwhelmed by the task.***

The TANF application processes are often challenging for refugees to navigate due to language barriers, literacy issues, and lack of familiarity with the U.S. public assistance system. This can be compounded by the need to meet certain eligibility requirements, provide documentation, and meet with multiple staff and/or agencies. Local communities have implemented the following strategies to make the application process easier for refugees:

- In some locations, resettlement agency staff assist refugees with their initial applications, sometimes accompanying them to meetings at the public assistance agency. This is particularly helpful when public assistance agency staff do not specialize in working with refugees and have limited knowledge about their unique circumstances or when TANF applications are online.
- Co-locating TANF eligibility workers at resettlement agencies reduces the burden on refugees and the resettlement caseworkers who accompany them because they are not required to go to the local TANF office to apply for benefits. Co-location also increases the coordination of services for refugees.
- In four study sites, resettlement agency staff are authorized to represent refugees during the application process, further reducing the burden on refugees. Authorizing resettlement agency staff to speak on behalf of refugees allows public assistance agency staff to conduct interviews with resettlement agency caseworkers rather than

refugees directly, and thus eliminates issues of language and refugees' lack of established telephone numbers.

***Communication barriers exist between agency staff and refugees.***

Communication between public assistance agency staff and newly arrived refugees is complicated by language barriers and refugees' lack of established telephone numbers, as well as by differences in cultural norms, including perceptions of promptness, discomfort answering personal questions, and reluctance to disclose information regarding mental health. Public assistance agency staff typically do not have the same levels of cultural and linguistic competency as resettlement agency staff. Although resettlement agency caseworkers often accompany refugees to the local TANF office to apply, caseworkers often cannot stay to help agency staff and refugees communicate. Sites have implemented the following procedures to overcome communication barriers:

- Cross-training between resettlement agency and public assistance agency staff has helped ensure that TANF services are delivered in culturally appropriate ways and incorporate strategies to engage trauma-affected refugees and address mental health concerns.
- Some public assistance agencies—including in Oakland/Macomb—employ bilingual staff. Others allow agencies to hire multilingual staff for their specialized units to work with refugees and other applicants with limited English proficiency.
- To make interpretation services more readily available, some local TANF agencies provide office space (“one-stop hubs”) for resettlement agency and other RSO staff. Alternatively, some resettlement agencies co-locate TANF staff in their office—including in Montgomery County—which provides refugees with the same accessibility to bilingual staff.

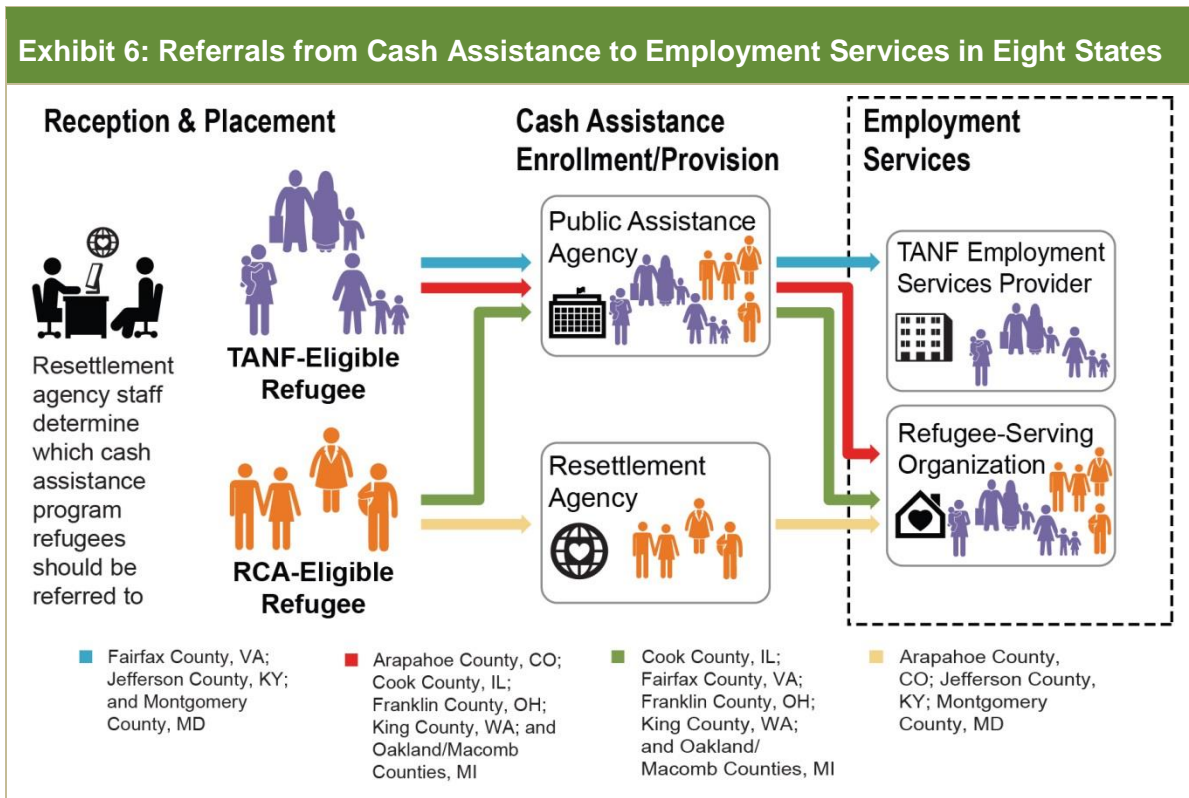


## 4. Provision of Employment Services

Refugees receiving TANF or RCA access an array of employment-related programs, including on-the-job training and vocational training. They are referred for these services soon after being determined eligible for cash assistance.

Exhibit 6 depicts the various pathways from cash assistance enrollment to employment services, by cash assistance program. Focusing first on TANF-receiving refugees, in five sites (Arapahoe County, Cook County, Franklin County, King County, and Oakland/Macomb Counties), the public assistance agency refers refugees to RSOs for employment services (as indicated by the red arrow). In the three other sites (Fairfax County, Jefferson County, and Montgomery County), refugees receiving TANF are referred to the same programs that serve non-refugees (as indicated by the blue arrow). Among these, Jefferson County and Montgomery County contract out their employment services to community-based organizations, whereas Fairfax County operates its own in-house employment services program.

In contrast, in all eight sites, refugees receiving RCA from refugee resettlement agencies or public assistance agencies are all referred to RSOs for employment services (as indicated by the green and tan arrows).



The sections below provide an overview of the work requirements for refugees receiving TANF or RCA assistance, including exemptions from participation in work activities and

sanctions for noncompliance. The chapter concludes with a description of the employment services provided through each program.

#### 4.1 TANF Work Requirements

States set their own policies under the TANF program; however, states must meet the federal work participation rate (WPR) set by ACF, which requires that a certain portion of their TANF families with a work-eligible individual are participating in specified work activities for a minimum number of hours each month. The **TANF Work Activities** text box outlines the federal requirements and types of activities that count towards the WPR. Appendix E lists the specific TANF work requirements for the states where the eight study sites are located. States that do not meet their WPR targets can face financial penalties.

Work is a fundamental goal of the TANF program, and TANF-receiving refugees are typically subject to the same work requirements as non-refugees under the program:

- All but 5 of the 48 SRCs reported that once refugees in their state enroll in TANF, they are subject to the same TANF work requirements as non-refugees receiving TANF.
- The other five SRCs reported that refugees in their state are subject to different work requirements for at least the first six months in the TANF program, allowing refugees to focus on learning English and acclimate to their new environments.

Among the eight study sites, only Jefferson County reported having different requirements for refugees. TANF-receiving refugees with limited English skills are allowed to take ESL classes full-time at the resettlement agencies (along with RCA recipients) for their first two months in the United States; after two months, they are required to participate in work activities. The other seven sites encourage refugees receiving TANF to participate in ESL, but in combination with work or job search, which allows their participation to count in those states' WPRs.

### TANF Work Activities

To meet the federal requirements, states must require families receiving TANF cash assistance with a work-eligible individual to participate for a minimum number of hours on average per week. To count as “working”:

- All families: minimum of 30 hours per week (except 20 hours for single-parent families with a child under age 6)
- Two-parent families with two work-eligible individuals: total of 35 hours per week, or 55 hours if receiving federal child care assistance

An average of at least 20 of the 30 hours for all families, and at least 30 of the 35 hours (or at least 50 of the 55 hours if receiving federal child care assistance) for two-parent families must be in “core” activities. The remaining hours can be in non-core activities. (Single-parent families with a child under age 6 can only receive credit for participation in core activities.)

#### Core activities:

- Job search and job readiness assistance (up to 6 or 12-weeks per year)
- Unsubsidized employment
- Subsidized employment
- Work experience
- On-the-job training
- Vocational educational training (up to 12 months)
- Community service
- Child care for others doing community service

#### Non-core activities:

- Jobs skills training directly related to employment
- Education directly related to employment
- High school/GED

#### English as a Second Language:

ESL classes count toward the 30 hours requirement only if the recipient is spending at least 20 hours per week on average in core activities or if ESL is incorporated in vocational educational training, which is limited to 12 months over a lifetime.

#### 4.1.1 Exemptions

All states require TANF families with a work-eligible individual to work or to participate in work-related activities; however, state programs exempt some recipients from work requirements. These exemptions may apply to TANF-receiving refugees. Exhibit 7 lists the TANF exemptions for single-parent and two-parent households in the eight states where study sites were located. As this exhibit shows:

- Five of the eight states exempt recipients who are ill or incapacitated, and seven states exempt recipients who are caring for an ill or incapacitated family member.

- Five states exempt recipients who are older (age varies).
- No state exempts recipients who are pregnant, although seven states exempt recipients with very young children (three also exempt those with older children if the state or county cannot guarantee child care).
- Five states exempt recipients who are victims of domestic violence.

**Exhibit 7: TANF Exemption Policies for Study Sites, 2015**

State	Ill or Incapacitated	Caregiver for Ill or Incapacitated Family Member	Elderly (in years)	Pregnancy	Caretaker for Child Under Age of (in months)	Age (in months) of Child When Child Care Is Not Guaranteed	Victim of Domestic Violence
Colorado <sup>a</sup>	No	No	No	No	No	72	No
Illinois <sup>b</sup>	Yes	Yes	60	No	12	No	Yes
Kentucky <sup>c</sup>	No	Yes	60	No	12	72	Yes
Maryland	Yes	Yes	No	No	12	No	Yes
Michigan	Yes	Yes <sup>d</sup>	65	No	2	72 <sup>d</sup>	Yes
Ohio	No	Yes	No	No	12	No	Yes
Virginia <sup>e</sup>	Yes	Yes	60	No	12	No	No
Washington	Yes	Yes	55	No	12	No	No

Source: The Urban Institute’s Welfare Rules Database (2015), funded by the Administration for Children and Families and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Notes:

- Two-parent families are not eligible for an exemption due to unavailability of child care.
- Exemptions apply to only the parent caring for a child under 12 months in a two-parent unit.
- Only one parent may be exempt for caring for an incapacitated family member.
- Applies to only one parent in a two-parent unit.
- In two-parent units, only one parent may be exempt.

Exemptions from work requirements can be critical for refugee families who fled their home country to escape persecution and may need physical or mental health services and other treatment to address post-traumatic stress disorder and other illnesses associated with their experiences. Additionally, some refugees may be caring for ill family members and those with young children may not be used to leaving them in the care of non-family members.

**4.1.2 Sanctions**

All states impose sanctions on TANF recipients who fail to comply with their TANF work requirements. Sanctions may involve reducing the TANF benefit or closing the case

completely.<sup>29</sup> Many states increase the severity of the sanction if the recipient continues with noncompliance or for repeated instances of noncompliance.

Exhibit 8 summarizes the sanction policies in place in the study sites at the time of site selection. As this exhibit shows, in all sites, TANF families could lose their entire benefit for noncompliance, though in half the sites they are first subject to a benefit reduction. The length of the sanction ranges from just one month (or until the recipient complies) to permanent; in the two states that permanently close the case, this occurs after three instances of noncompliance.

**Exhibit 8: TANF Sanction Policies for Noncompliance in Study Sites, Single-Parent and Two-Parent Head of Unit, 2015**

State	Initial Sanction		Most Severe Sanction	
	Reduction in Benefit	Length of Sanction	Reduction in Benefit	Length of Sanction
Colorado <sup>a</sup>	25%	1 month	Entire benefit	3 months+
Illinois	50%	Until compliance	Entire benefit	3 months+
Kentucky	Pro rata portion of the benefit	Until compliance	Entire benefit	Until compliance
Maryland	Entire benefit	Until compliance	Entire benefit	Until in compliance for 30 days
Michigan	Case is closed	3 months	Case is closed	Permanent
Ohio	Entire benefit	1 month or until compliance (whichever is longer)	Entire benefit	6 months or until the failure/refusal ceases (whichever is longer)
Virginia	Entire benefit	Until compliance for a minimum of 1 month	Entire benefit	Until compliance for a minimum of 6 months
Washington	Adult portion of benefit or 40% (whichever is greater)	Until in compliance for 4 weeks <sup>b</sup>	Case is closed	Permanent

Source: The Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database (2015), funded by the Administration for Children and Families and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Notes:

a. Counties have the option to determine the amount and duration of sanctions. The policies listed here refer to Denver County.

b. Sanction remains in effect until the recipient is compliant for four consecutive weeks; after four weeks of compliance, benefits are restored to their pre-sanction level.

<sup>29</sup> In some states, TANF families lose their entire benefit, though the case is not closed. This allows the state to choose to reinstate the family without requiring they reapply for assistance.

Staff interviewed in some of the eight sites reported they were a little more lenient in imposing sanctions on refugees receiving TANF than on typical TANF recipients—especially during the first month after resettlement—because refugees were unfamiliar with the TANF program rules and requirements. In most sites, staff reported that sanctions on refugees were rare. For example:

- In Arapahoe County, employment counselors at the resettlement agencies are responsible for recommending to the public assistance agency case managers when sanctions should be imposed, and the employment counselors do not emphasize sanctions as strongly as do TANF staff working with non-refugees. As a result, TANF-receiving refugees there are less likely to face sanctions for not meeting work participation requirements. Because the counselors believe sanctions do more harm than good or are not effective, they usually address noncompliance with stern conversations about expectations.
- In Franklin County, sanctions on the refugee population are also rare. Staff interviewed there speculated that refugees generally are more compliant with the rules than the typical TANF recipient.

The leniency shown towards refugees may be critical given the short amount of time refugees have to become self-sufficient while navigating a new culture and system of supports.

## 4.2 RCA Work Requirements

Because RCA benefits are limited to a maximum of eight months, RSOs providing employment services focus refugees on gaining employment quickly. However, refugees continue to be eligible for employment supports and social services funded by RSS or TAG for up to five years.

Unlike the TANF program, the RCA program does not impose established participation rates on states. Instead, employable (i.e., non-exempt) RCA recipients must participate in employment and training services within 30 days of receiving assistance, though states and local resettlement agencies determine the specific requirements and types of employment services offered. Similarly, states and local agencies have discretion in determining the circumstances that may exempt refugees from participating in employment activities. However, because RCA recipients need to become self-sufficient quickly, the expectation is that most recipients will seek out employment services and not pursue an exemption from the requirements.<sup>30</sup>

Among the eight sites visited, all require employable RCA recipients to engage in work activities, though most do not have hourly work requirements. Only Franklin County imposes such a requirement: employable refugees receiving RCA must complete 54 hours of work

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<sup>30</sup> Source: Refugee Resettlement Program: Requirements for Refugee Cash Assistance; and Refugee Medical Assistance; Final Rule, CFR Parts 400 and 401, March 22, 2000.

experience or job search and 56 hours of ESL each month. The other sites typically require that RCA-receiving employable refugees attend some combination of job search assistance and ESL.

#### 4.2.1 Exemptions

No site reported a formal exemption policy. However, respondents in Franklin County reported that RCA recipients (similar to TANF recipients) may get exemptions for physical and mental health reasons.

#### 4.2.2 Sanctions

Refugees receiving RCA who fail to comply with the program requirements can lose their entire benefit. However, RCA sanctions for not participating in work activities are rare because RCA benefits are short in duration and RCA providers depend on employment service providers to inform them about noncompliance. For example:

- In Oakland/Macomb Counties, the state agency does not monitor the hourly work activities and is informed by the RCA service provider only if refugee recipients turn down employment or are not complying with work requirements.
- Staff in Montgomery County reported sanctions are tied to attendance and participation in ESL and work activities, rather than to meeting required hours. Staff reported sanctions are rare for refugees generally; however, sanctions are more prevalent among asylees who have been in the country longer and may be more selective about accepting employment.

While there is less focus on sanctions under RCA than TANF, RCA providers emphasize employment since the short duration of benefit receipt means RCA-receiving refugees must become self-sufficient in a very short period of time.

### 4.3 Employment Services

The types of employment services TANF-receiving and RCA-receiving refugees are provided depends on the organizations providing the services, though the site visits revealed that similar services are provided to both groups.

#### 4.3.1 TANF Program

Given the federal WPR requirement on states, all TANF programs offer employment services to TANF recipients. After the public assistance agency approves the TANF application, it refers non-exempt recipients (i.e., those who must participate in work activities) to the agency's welfare-to-work program. The welfare-to-work program typically employs case managers who meet with TANF recipients, assess their employment barriers and supportive service needs, help them to develop employment plans, refer them to program activities, and monitor their participation.

### **TANF Employment Service Providers**

Some public assistance agencies contract with private organizations to operate their welfare-to-work program, whereas others operate their program in house. Generally, even when public assistance agencies run their own program, they contract out some services to other agencies or organizations. For example, in some localities, the public assistance agency that oversees the TANF program provides case management, but may contract with the state's workforce agency or private organizations for employment-related services and with the state's education agency for basic education or ESL instruction.

*"[The ECBO] helped me to get a job. They helped to make a resume and get some possible interview questions. The same language speaking person is employed there, who has been a great help."*

To provide employment services to refugees receiving TANF, public assistance agencies might contract with RSOs (e.g., local resettlement agencies or ECBOs). Among the 46 SRCs that responded to this survey question, 10 reported that TANF-receiving refugees participate in employment services alongside non-refugees exclusively; 11 reported that refugees receive refugee-specific employment services through resettlement agencies or ECBOs; and 25 reported that both options were available (depending on the locality).

In five of the eight study sites, the public assistance agency contracts with RSOs to provide some or all employment services:

- In Franklin, King, and Oakland/Macomb Counties, the refugee's case manager is housed within the public assistance agency and responsible for developing the recipient's employment plan and monitoring participation in employment activities. However, those counties contract with RSOs to provide employment-related services to refugees.
- Three sites do not contract with RSOs: Jefferson and Montgomery Counties contract with CBOs to operate their welfare-to-work programs, which serve refugees and non-refugees, whereas Fairfax operates its welfare-to-work program in house.

### **TANF Employment Services Provided**

Across all study sites, the typical services provided to TANF-receiving refugees include some combination of job readiness assistance and ESL instruction. Some sites also offer refugees vocational training or work experience; a few sites allow refugees to pursue a GED or postsecondary degree, generally referring them to adult school programs or local community colleges for these services.

- **Job Readiness Assistance.** All eight study sites provide TANF-receiving refugees with job readiness assistance. Most programs offer workshops that cover job search skills, such as developing resumes, completing job applications, and preparing for interviews. As shown in Exhibit 9, some sites contract with RSOs to provide the job readiness services; in other sites, the public assistance agency or CBOs offer these services. When the TANF program contracts with RSOs, the workshops and classes are



customized for refugees, covering topics on American workplace norms such as work attire, work schedules, and employer expectations. The refugee-specific programs have staff who provide more individual help than is typical in the TANF programs for non-refugees. This extra help involves staff reaching out to employers, arranging job interviews, and accompanying refugees on the interviews as translators.

- **English as a Second Language.** In all eight study sites, refugees receiving TANF can attend ESL classes. In several sites, however, there are limitations on their attendance in accordance with core work activity requirements. For example, a typical employment plan for a single-parent refugee receiving TANF in Franklin County consists of 86 hours of work-related activities (e.g., job search) plus 43 hours of ESL each month.<sup>31</sup> Because the recipients are participating in core work activities, and the ESL contributes to the overall weekly hourly requirement, the refugees count as participating in the state's WPR. In contrast, TANF-receiving refugees in Jefferson County can participate full-time in ESL classes (with RCA recipients) for their first two months of TANF receipt, even though they are not participating in a core activity and thus are not counted in the numerator of the WPR. As shown in Exhibit 9, TANF programs offer ESL classes at resettlement agencies, CBOs, and public education institutions such as community colleges or public schools.
- **Vocational Training.** While not the focus of the study sites' TANF employment service programs, vocational training is available in some. King County offers a number of training programs for refugees in electronic manufacturing, commercial truck driving, forklift operations, child care, sewing, and warehousing. A small number of refugees in Fairfax County participate in computer support and child care training. In Cook County, interested TANF-receiving refugees are referred to a hospitality and customer service training program.
- **Work Experience / Community Service.** In several study sites, staff reported that refugees are encouraged to volunteer, typically with a nonprofit organization, to gain experience they can put on their resume. Work experience or community service placements are generally limited to refugees with some proficiency in English. Two sites—Fairfax County and King County—have subsidized jobs programs that allow recipients to get paid for their work placements.

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<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in King County, a typical plan consists of 12 hours of ESL and 23 hours of job search each week. In Oakland/Macomb Counties, work activities for refugees include up to 12 weeks of ESL at 20 hours per week in addition to core work activities.

**Exhibit 9: Organizations Providing Job Readiness and ESL Services to Refugees, by Benefit Program**

Site	Job Readiness		ESL Instruction	
	TANF	RCA	TANF	RCA
<b>Arapahoe County, CO</b>	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies	Community college	Community college
<b>Cook County, IL</b>	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies
<b>Fairfax County, VA</b>	Local public agency	Local resettlement agencies	Public schools	Public schools, CBOs, and community colleges
<b>Franklin County, OH</b>	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)
<b>Jefferson County, KY</b>	CBO (not refugee specific)	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies	Local resettlement agencies
<b>King County, WA</b>	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs and community colleges	RSOs and community colleges
<b>Montgomery County, MD</b>	CBO (not refugee specific)	Local resettlement agencies	Community college	Community college
<b>Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI</b>	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	Resettlement agencies	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)	RSOs (including resettlement agencies)

Key: CBO/community-based organization. RSO/refugee-serving organization.

As previously noted, RCA recipients can access employment services funded by RSS and TAG; however, TANF-receiving refugees who have been in the United States for fewer than five years are eligible for these services, as well. For example, in Fairfax County, TANF-eligible refugees receive employment services from the resettlement agencies during the period before their TANF benefits begin. Once enrolled in TANF, they are expected to receive their employment services from the TANF program. However, staff reported that some TANF-receiving refugees prefer to access services from the resettlement agency.

### 4.3.2 RCA Program

Like those receiving TANF, employable refugees receiving RCA are required to participate in work activities, although the requirements vary and are more flexible than for TANF. Staff who work in organizations that receive RSS and TAG funding help refugees develop their employment plans, refer them to work activities, and monitor their progress in activities. Because many RSS and TAG programs track refugees' outcomes (e.g., employment) and

not hours of participation, there is less emphasis on hours of participation for RCA recipients versus TANF recipients.

### **RCA Employment Service Providers**

RCA-receiving refugees in the study sites can access similar services as TANF-receiving refugees, including job readiness and ESL classes, though there are some differences with how services are delivered in the study sites. In particular:

- In three sites where the TANF program does not contract with RSOs (Fairfax, Jefferson, and Montgomery Counties), RCA and TANF recipients access services separately from different organizations.
- In the other five sites (Arapahoe, Cook, Franklin, King, and Oakland/Macomb Counties), refugees served by TANF and RCA programs access services from the same organizations, and the services do not differ significantly. In King County, the RSS formula grant, state TANF block grant, and general state resources fund the state's employment services program; it serves not just refugees receiving RCA and TANF but also others with low English proficiency receiving assistance from the state.

### **RCA Employment Services Provided**

The eight-month time limit on RCA benefits encourages rapid employment placement, which can lead families into low-paying jobs that do not offer long-term stability or advancement. Some refugees in focus groups held in each site reported wanting more time to learn English or pursue training and education opportunities. For example, one refugee expressed apprehension about getting a job before he learned English, wishing he could stay in school longer.

Among the sites visited, most employment services programs have job developers who help identify employment opportunities and help refugees with the application process. Some programs have established relationships with large employers that generally have multiple job openings each month. For example, one program in Franklin County developed a relationship with a farm that hired a large number of refugees with agricultural backgrounds. A program in Jefferson County developed relationships with businesses to hire refugees, with an agreement that the program provided interpreters to facilitate on-site work orientations. Arapahoe County job developers worked with employers to provide transportation to job sites for refugees hired.

Staff reported that it is challenging to help refugees who arrive with professional skills but could not use them without obtaining additional U.S. certifications. A few study sites have re-credentialing programs to assist these high-skilled refugees. For example, Jefferson County, which has resettled skilled refugees from Cuba, has a program that has helped with re-licensing, credentialing, and licensing in as many as 30 different professions, including some medical

*"I was searching for a job with my resettlement agency for four months, but I always got the same answer: 'over qualified.' I started work[ing] independently to find a job until I found one."*

professions. Fairfax County, which has resettled skilled refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan, developed networking opportunities to connect them with working professionals in the area. In King County, one program matches professional refugees with mentors in their field.

Though Cuban and Haitian entrants and Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders are eligible for many of the same benefits and services as other refugees, including TANF, RCA, and related employment services, providers reported different challenges serving these specific groups. Among the study sites, Jefferson County serves a particularly high number of Cubans, and Fairfax County serves a high number of SIV holders. The information in the text box **Services for Cubans and Special Immigrant Visa Holders** on page 32 comes largely from the visits to these two sites.

## Services for Cubans and Special Immigrant Visa Holders

**Cuban Entrants.** Cuban parolees, Cuban asylum applicants, and Cubans in pending removal proceedings are collectively referred to as “Cuban entrants” and are eligible for refugee benefits.<sup>a</sup> “Cuban entrant” is a public benefit classification and not an immigration status. Before 2017, longstanding policy allowed most Cubans entering the United States without visas to be granted parole. The policy ended in January 2017, but the change did not affect Cubans’ eligibility for refugee benefits.<sup>b</sup>

During the Jefferson County (KY) site visit, which occurred before the policy change, resettlement agencies described several challenges in serving Cuban entrants, most of which were because most do not go through the refugee resettlement process:

- **Unpredictable numbers.** Because most entrants do not arrive through planned resettlement, the local resettlement agencies do not have information on how many will arrive during a given period, which in turn impacts funding. The resettlement agencies reported having limited capacity to serve the higher number of arrivals.
- **Time limits restricting the benefits provided.** For Cubans, RCA’s eight-month eligibility period begins when they become Cuban entrants. However, unlike refugees who apply for benefits as part of Reception and Placement services, entrants often do not apply until several months after becoming Cuban entrants. Many therefore receive fewer months of RCA benefits. The capacity constraints mentioned above further delay enrollment for some.
- **Difficulties in obtaining employment authorization.** Cuban parolees do not begin the process of obtaining employment authorization until after arriving in the United States. Agency staff reported that obtaining authorization can take months for Cubans, versus one to two weeks for other refugees. This delay affects how quickly some parolees can attain employment, obtain Social Security numbers and access some benefits (e.g., SNAP).
- **Complications with public agency benefits.** Although public agency staff generally understood how refugee status affects eligibility for benefits, some were not familiar with the eligibility rules for Cuban entrants and thus improperly denied benefits in some cases.

**Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Holders.** Certain Iraqis and Afghans who assisted the U.S. government or U.S. military forces overseas, as well as their spouses and children, are granted Special Immigrant Visas and are eligible for refugee benefits. Unlike Cuban entrants, many SIV holders receive resettlement assistance and Reception and Placement services from the resettlement agencies. However, some SIV holders in Fairfax County (VA) were advised to wait several weeks before applying for Social Security numbers to prevent duplicate applications in the system, as SIVs also may have applied for Social Security numbers prior to arrival in the U.S. In some instances this caused delays in accessing some benefits, such as TANF.

Other challenges in serving SIV holders arise from relatively high education levels. The nature of their work for the United States means many speak English well and have work experience. Consequently, service providers often have difficulty helping such individuals find jobs commensurate with their skills.

Notes:

a. Administration for Children and Families, *Annual Report to Congress: Office of Refugee Resettlement Fiscal Year 2015*, [https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc\\_15\\_final\\_508.pdf](https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/arc_15_final_508.pdf)

b. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2017. *Fact Sheet: Changes to Parole and Expedited Removal*

## 5. Coordination and Integration Strategies and Challenges

As described throughout this report, refugees receive services from multiple programs that are supported through several different funding sources. Many refugees interact with multiple agencies, organizations, and staff to access the full range of cash assistance and employment services available to them. This creates challenges both for refugees and for the service providers who assist them.

For refugees, challenges are logistical and bureaucratic. Chapter 3 discussed several of these challenges: public assistance agency staff serving refugees may not be familiar with the resettlement process and state public assistance policies for refugees; application processes are difficult for refugees to navigate; and language barriers can make it difficult for agency staff and refugees to communicate with each other. Further, as discussed in Chapter 4, many refugees must then work with separate organizations to receive employment services, while ensuring that they are complying with the work participation requirements in order to receive cash assistance.

For the agencies and organizations, the challenges relate to ensuring that their refugee participants receive the full range of services for which they are eligible and that will help them obtain employment and achieve self-sufficiency. Agencies and organizations also want to avoid duplicating services their participants receive elsewhere. Another challenge, particularly for agencies primarily serving non-refugees, is that staff may not have specialized knowledge and experience relevant to working with refugees.

Coordination and integration of program services can help address both sets of challenges by reducing the steps refugees must navigate to access different services, improving information sharing among staff at provider organizations, and allowing organizations with less capacity and knowledge in serving refugees to more easily leverage their partners with more specialized experience.

The concepts of coordination and integration of program services are closely related. For the purposes of this report:

- The term *coordination* refers to efforts by multiple different agencies and organizations to deliver coordinated services to refugees in situations where the agencies and organizations operate related programs.
- The term *integration* refers to efforts by a single agency or organization that operates multiple related programs to deliver services to refugees in such a way as to appear seamless from the refugee perspective.

Agencies and organizations serving refugees have taken a variety of steps to facilitate coordination and communication across programs or to integrate their own programs or both. This section discusses various practices and strategies the eight study sites used, as well as factors that have gotten in the way of further coordination and integration.

## 5.1 Coordination Strategies across Providers

Among the eight study sites, the main coordination strategies fall into three categories: (1) specialized units or points of contact within the public assistance agency that facilitate communication with resettlement agencies; (2) co-location of staff from one provider at another provider's service delivery locations; and (3) meetings among various stakeholder organizations working with refugees in the community. Each is described below.

### 5.1.1 Specialized Units or Points of Contact within Public Assistance Agencies

As noted in Chapter 3, local TANF offices in several states operate specialized units where staff focus on refugees. This strategy ensures there are staff at the agency with specialized knowledge about serving refugees. Such units also can play an important role for communications between the RSOs and the public assistance agencies, because the resettlement agency staff have particular contacts at the public assistance agency who deal with their participants and are knowledgeable about refugee issues. For example, the specialized unit in Cook County's public assistance agency communicates daily with the resettlement agencies about individual refugees and regularly with the employment services providers who serve refugees. In Jefferson County, the presence of a special unit in the public assistance agency allowed resettlement agency staff to expedite the intake interview process by making it possible to submit forms before a refugee's scheduled intake appointment.<sup>32</sup>

Where special units do not exist, some public assistance agencies designate a single staff member or a small number of staff members to serve as the primary points of contact on refugee TANF and RCA cases. Such arrangements are in place in Arapahoe, Fairfax, and Franklin Counties, and staff interviewed reported it had improved coordination between RSOs and the public assistance agencies, and streamlined processes for the refugees.

### 5.1.2 Co-location of One Provider's Staff at Another Provider's Offices

The goal of co-locating staff among providers is to make it easier for refugees to access otherwise separate services. Co-location facilitates communication across service providers; however it does not reflect an administrative integration of the programs. There were several examples of co-location among the study sites:

***Public Assistance Agency Eligibility Workers Located On-site at RSOs.*** One RSO in Macomb County arranged to have public assistance agency staff on-site at all times who can directly serve its participants. Similarly, in Montgomery County, public assistance agency caseworkers are co-located with one of the resettlement agencies, which helps facilitate refugees' access to benefits such as TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid.

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<sup>32</sup> The unit in Jefferson County's public assistance agency was disbanded in early 2016 as part of a general business process redesign in the agency, but at the time of the visit, staff anticipated it would be reinstated.

***RSO Staff Located On-site at Public Assistance Agency Offices.*** In King County, some of the contracted employment service providers have staff co-located one or more days per week at the public agency office to facilitate referrals.

In Oakland/Macomb Counties, an ECBO under contract with the public assistance agency co-locates staff in several local offices to provide interpretation and translation services. Respondents said that the public assistance agencies can process program applications for refugees faster due to this arrangement.

***One-Stop Arrangements.*** Respondents in several study sites talked about the goal of creating “one-stop” hubs for refugee services from multiple organizations. Other sites have a more integrated approach to creating one-stop locations, in which organizations try to deliver a wide variety of services themselves. For example, one of Jefferson County’s resettlement agencies provides R&P, RCA, Matching Grant services, ESL classes, cultural and work orientation classes, employment services, elderly services, and case management. In addition, the agency has in-house physical and mental health support services and a center for mothers with very young children.

### **5.1.3 Stakeholder Meetings across Refugee-Serving Providers**

ORR and the Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration require refugee programs to establish quarterly stakeholder meetings with the goal of promoting better coordination of services for refugees across providers in local areas. Meetings focus on the issues and needs of the local refugee population, but the specifics vary by location. In all sites, attendees include public assistance agency and resettlement agency staff, and some sites include state and county administrators, RSOs, the public school system, local police, government social services or health agencies, and faith-based organizations.

Several site visit respondents said these meetings increased coordination and communications among RSOs and agencies. Attendees share information on best or promising practices for serving refugees, and in some sites meetings offer presentations or trainings on topics such as addressing mental health issues or trauma among refugees or a “Refugees 101” training on basic refugee-specific issues. Fairfax County uses stakeholder meetings to connect refugees with employers who were refugees themselves.

Despite the generally positive descriptions, a few respondents reported some challenges in conducting the stakeholder meetings effectively, such as lack of support from local officials, and competition among organizations for participants affecting how those organizations work together.

## **5.2 Integration Strategies across a Provider’s Programs**

In each of the eight study sites, there was at least some degree of integration among resettlement agencies, cash assistance programs serving refugees, and employment service providers. This section describes several different arrangements within the eight sites.



### 5.2.1 Integration of Resettlement Services and Cash Assistance

Among the eight sites, integration of cash assistance with resettlement services occurred in the sites with Wilson-Fish and Public-Private Partnership models, where resettlement agencies administer both RCA and R&P services. Resettlement agencies can enroll their RCA-eligible participants into the program as part of the R&P process, without a separate application and eligibility determination process at the public assistance agency.

Participation in RCA can be a relatively seamless experience for refugees when the resettlement agency also provides employment services. This may extend to other services. In Jefferson County, for example, two resettlement agencies also offer services including ESL classes, medical assistance, and mental health coordination.

However, even with integrated services, RCA recipients may still need to interact with public assistance agency staff to obtain other services not directly administered by the resettlement agencies. While applying for TANF or RCA at the resettlement agency appears more convenient for refugees, coordination with other services such as SNAP, Medicaid, and child care subsidies, may be better when refugees apply for TANF at the public assistance agency.

### 5.2.2 Integration of Resettlement Services and Employment Services

As described in Chapter 4, refugees receiving RCA or TANF can access refugee-specific services as part of their employment activities in most states. In most cases, the resettlement agencies are among the organizations providing the employment services, which allows for a degree of integration with R&P—refugees receive employment services from an organization with which they are already familiar, and the organization's staff already have information about the refugees.

For RCA, refugees usually receive initial employment services from the resettlement agency that resettled them. Such continuity allows for relatively seamless handoff, as refugees move out of the R&P phase and into the phase where they are trying to obtain employment quickly before their cash assistance ends.

For TANF, the picture is often more complicated. In some sites, refugees receive the bulk of their employment services through the public assistance agency following initial shorter-term services from resettlement agencies. In other sites where outside organizations provide refugee-specific employment services, the provider may end up being the participant's resettlement agency. For example, in Cook County, most refugees are referred back to their resettlement agency for employment services. However, the extent to which that is the case differs from site to site.

King County stands out because of the degree of integration of funding involved in its employment services; this is described further in the text box **Washington State's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Pathway Program** on page 37.

### 5.3 Challenges to Coordination and Integration

Though a number of sites demonstrated program efforts to improve coordination and integration, challenges remain. Some sites described ways in which coordination and integration continue to be limited, as well as impediments to further coordination and integration.

**Provider Competition.** One challenge is a reluctance of staff in one agency to make referrals for services to a competing agency. It is not uncommon for RSOs in a community to compete for refugee participants. This can be an impediment to full coordination and can prevent refugees from receiving services that may be more appropriate for them from other providers. Some sites acknowledged that resettlement agencies may only refer refugees to in-house services or may discourage refugees from choosing other employment services providers.

**Shifting Populations.** Another challenge is coordinating services when population patterns shift. For example, in Montgomery County, refugees are being housed in a neighboring county and even though their cash assistance may be provided through their local TANF office, they must travel to Montgomery County for services provided by their resettlement agency.

#### Washington State's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Pathway Program

Washington State established its LEP Pathway program in 1999 with the aim of creating a single program that provides employability services to refugees (and other groups with limited English skills) regardless of whether they are recipients of TANF, RCA, or Washington's State Family Assistance program. LEP Pathway is funded by RSS formula grant funds, TANF funds, and general state funds. The program is built off a "braided funding" approach: the state contracts with employment and training organizations that serve a variety of customers, resettlement agencies, ECBOs, and community colleges to provide LEP Pathway program services. Refugees are directed to the LEP Pathway program while Washington's Department of Social and Health Services, in conjunction with its Office of Refugee & Immigrant Assistance, determines and internally bills the appropriate funding sources at a later point. For both TANF and RCA recipients, the state allows refugees to select which LEP Pathway service provider they will be referred to for employment services, if eligible.

## 6. Refugee Program Data and Data Systems

Agencies and organizations collect and maintain data on the refugees they serve for the purposes of determining eligibility, administering benefits, tracking participation, and fulfilling reporting requirements. To the extent that data on services and outcomes could be easily made available for analysis, it would help both researchers and program administrators better understand the effectiveness of serving refugees through the TANF and RCA programs.

To explore existing data, the study team asked interviewees during the site visits about the data their organizations collect and the systems they use to store and manage data. The goal was to gain a general sense of data availability rather than to develop a comprehensive review of the specific data collected and maintained at each site.

This chapter presents findings from these inquiries. The first section provides context about the ways in which organizations and agencies serving refugees currently use data. The second section gives an overview of the data systems used and the types of data maintained in each system. It closes with a brief discussion of implications for researchers.

### 6.1 Current Uses of Data

For the most part, data collected by programs working with refugees, including the public agencies that provide cash assistance and other government benefits, are primarily not intended for research or analysis purposes. Rather, they serve two purposes: (1) managing program operations and services; and (2) meeting reporting requirements for federal, state, and other funders. These uses largely dictate the types of data programs maintain.

#### 6.1.1 Managing Program Operations

Refugee-serving programs, including TANF, RCA, and associated employment services, collect data to determine eligibility, track services provided, provide case management, and monitor service provision. The data collected vary according to each program's rules and services as well as by state and local requirements. For example, TANF programs maintain information on benefits, participation in work activities, and time limits. Some study sites reported maintaining case management-related information such as education, skills, and career goals. RCA programs similarly track information on benefits, and may also maintain case management-related information. Many RCA programs do not track work activity hours since they are not a focus of RCA participation requirements.

#### 6.1.2 Meeting Reporting Requirements

According to staff interviewed during site visits, federal and state reporting requirements are a primary factor in determining the data tracked by organizations and agencies administering TANF, RCA, and associated employment services. Federal reporting requirements, in particular, determine a core set of data elements that each program must track. However, the reporting requirements for TANF and refugee-specific programs are different.

Exhibit 10 summarizes the information that states must submit in federal reports for TANF, RCA, and refugee employment programs. (States must report separately on each ORR-funded program, including RCA, RSS, TAG, and targeted assistance discretionary grants.) Federal reporting requirements for TANF include many more measures than do those for the ORR-funded programs. Further, the level of detail required differs between TANF and the ORR-funded programs. TANF reporting requires states to submit a set of “disaggregated” (i.e., family- or individual-level) data, while ORR requires states to report only aggregated data (i.e., counts and averages). This distinction has implications affecting the availability of data for research use. Because states must report disaggregated data for TANF, datasets exist at the state level that contain the disaggregated information, and researchers looking to access such data may only need to interact with the state agency. In contrast, since states report aggregated data on ORR programs, they may only collect aggregated information from service providers. Consequently, researchers interested in accessing individual-level data on refugee services may need to request it directly from service providers. States review the quality of the disaggregated TANF data submitted to ACF, suggesting that TANF administrative data available may be more complete and accurate than individual-level data from ORR programs, whether available at the state level or from individual service providers.

Refugee status is not a required data element for TANF reporting, which limits the usefulness of the disaggregated TANF data for understanding services provided to refugees. While states report whether individuals on TANF are “qualified aliens,” they do not distinguish between refugees and other types of qualified aliens (e.g., non-refugee legal permanent residents who have resided in the United States for five or more years). As a result, state datasets may not include information that allow researchers to identify refugees. However, many state datasets may track this information; the state TANF systems in more than half of the sites visited contain it. Where such information is not included in the state data system, identifying refugees in the TANF caseload requires merging the state dataset with individual-level information from other sources such as the Department of State’s Refugee Arrival Data System (RADS) database.

**Exhibit 10: Federal Reporting Requirements for TANF, RCA, and Employment Services Programs**

	TANF <sup>a</sup>	RCA and ORR Employment Services <sup>b</sup>
<b>Frequency of Reporting</b>	Quarters	Trimesters
<b>Data Reported</b>	<p>Some aggregated, statewide measures; some disaggregated family-level or individual-level information.</p> <p><i>Aggregated measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of applications (total, approved, denied)</li> <li>• Total amount of assistance, by month</li> <li>• Number of families receiving assistance, by month (total, one-parent, two-parent, no parent)</li> <li>• Number of recipients (total, adult, children)</li> <li>• Number of noncustodial parents participating in work activities</li> <li>• Number of births (total, out-of-wedlock)</li> <li>• Number of closed cases</li> </ul> <p><i>Disaggregated measures:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of family members and relationships to the head of household</li> <li>• Demographic information (race/ethnicity, gender, age, marital status, citizenship status)</li> <li>• Receipt of assistance from other programs (e.g., subsidized housing, medical assistance, SNAP, child care, child support, transportation assistance, disability benefits)</li> <li>• Family income and cash resources</li> <li>• TANF sanctions</li> <li>• Cooperation with child support</li> <li>• Months of TANF receipt countable to federal and state time limits</li> <li>• Employment status</li> <li>• Hours spent in TANF work activities</li> </ul>	<p>Aggregated statewide totals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total number of participants active in each program during the reporting period</li> <li>• Total number of participants receiving various types of employment services</li> <li>• Number of participants who entered unsubsidized employment during the period (broken out by full-time and part-time employment)</li> <li>• Number of cash assistance terminations (i.e., ending receipt of RCA, TANF, or selected other cash assistance) due to earnings</li> <li>• Average hourly wage for those who entered employment</li> <li>• Number of participants who entered full-time employment with health benefits available</li> <li>• Number of participants employed 90 days after entering employment (broken out by full-time and part-time employment, as well as by type of cash assistance received, if any)</li> </ul>

Sources:

<sup>a</sup> ACF-199 TANF Data Report: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource/tanf-acf-pi-2014-03>

<sup>b</sup> ORR-6 Performance Report: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/resource/orr-6-performance-report>

## 6.2 Types of Data Systems

Exhibit 11 summarizes the various data systems used in the eight study sites to maintain and manage the data collected for program operation and reporting requirement purposes. The systems vary across sites, and in some cases, a single system may fit into more than one category. Each type is described in more detail below.

### Exhibit 11: Refugee Service Providers' Data Systems

System	Function				
	Eligibility Determination/ Enrollment	Benefits Receipt	Work Activity Tracking	Case Management	Reporting
State Human Services Agency	√	√	√	√	√
TANF Employment Services			√	√	√
Refugee-Specific Employment Services			√	√	√
Resettlement Agency	√	√	√	√	√

#### 6.2.1 State Human Services Agency Systems

State agencies have relatively complex systems for administering TANF programs. They are usually statewide systems, though in some states separate systems are used at the county level. Some systems may combine eligibility determination and enrollment functions with case management and may include functionality for work activity tracking. Such systems generally include other health and human services programs, such as SNAP and Medicaid; however, the full set of programs included in these systems varies from state to state. Consequently, researchers accessing data from these systems may be able to obtain information on refugee participation in multiple programs from the same source. Notably, in some states these systems include RCA but in others they do not. This is true even in some states where the same agency administers both TANF and RCA.

State human services agency systems may include data elements needed for TANF eligibility determination, TANF cash benefits provision, and TANF reporting requirements. Interviewees described these systems as containing a variety of demographic information, information on benefits received by household members, and information on participation in certain types of work activities. As discussed in the previous section, many, but not all, state systems include information on whether recipients are refugees.

## 6.2.2 TANF Employment Services Systems

For many states' TANF programs, the data systems used to track employment services are separate from the systems used for eligibility, enrollment, and benefits. In three of the study sites, employment service providers track work activities in a different statewide data system focused on employment services. In another three study sites, employment service providers use their own systems to track work activities. These systems include data on hours of participation in work activities, case management, and, in some cases, individual service plans that document educational and employment history, career goals, and barriers to employability.

Public assistance agencies use data from employment service providers, such as hours of participation in work activities, to confirm recipients' ongoing eligibility for TANF benefits. States have different processes for transferring information from employment service providers to public assistance agencies. In the three study sites where there is a statewide employment services system, the system communicates with the state TANF eligibility and benefits system. In the other three sites with separate systems, employment service providers report information to the public assistance agency using emailed or paper forms.

In the other two sites, workers use the same data system both to handle eligibility and benefits and to track employment services. In one (Fairfax County), the public assistance agency delivers employment services. In the other (Arapahoe County), contracted employment service providers enter information directly into the state system.

Since even employment service providers that use separate systems to track work activities must transfer information to the public assistance agency, researchers looking to obtain information on TANF benefits and work activities may be able to get both from the state human services agency system. However, they may wish to explore whether there are additional useful data in the employment services system that are not shared with the public assistance agency.

## 6.2.3 Refugee-Specific Employment Services Provider Systems

Refugee-specific employment services, such as those funded through RSS and TAG, are provided by multiple organizations in each study site. Systems used by these organizations in administering the refugee employment services may contain data elements such as demographic information, information needed to meet ORR reporting requirement (e.g., wages, job placements, job retention, employer-provided health benefits), and participation in employment services. Some contain case notes and service plans.

In five study sites, each organization has their own independent system for tracking services. In the others, organizations use a shared system. Examples of the types of arrangements include:

- **State Refugee Coordinator (SRC) Systems.** Some state SRC offices, including those in two study sites, operate systems that organizations receiving SRC funding use to

manage and track program activities. In the study sites, these systems include RCA and employment services operated with RSS and TAG funding.

- ***Inclusion of Refugee Employment Services in a Broader Employment Services System.*** Washington’s LEP Pathway program, which includes employment services for RCA and TANF recipients, enters data in the statewide participant services tracking system used for TANF and SNAP employment services.
- ***Ad Hoc, Organization-Specific Systems.*** Some sites do not have shared systems. Instead, each agency tracks its own activities and services, in some cases using simple spreadsheets rather than a more sophisticated system. These organizations provide regular reports to the state agencies.

The implication for researchers is that it may be possible to access individual-level data on refugee employment services from the SRC office or another state agency in some states. In others, such information may only be available directly from the various RSS- and TAG-funded service providers.

#### 6.2.4 Resettlement Agency Systems

Local resettlement agencies must provide the nine national resettlement agencies with data beyond what local agencies report to state agencies or to ORR. Systems used by local agencies contain demographic items; pre-arrival and post-arrival information; receipt of Reception and Placement services; employment status; and case notes. In at least some cases, local resettlement agencies use data systems provided and administered by their national partners.

Researchers may find information in these systems that is not available through other sources, and may wish to explore the potential for merging data from these systems with information on TANF receipt, RCA receipt, or employment services.

#### 6.2.5 Other Systems

In addition to the systems mentioned above, organizations and agencies visited as part of the study also use other data systems to administer refugee services. Interviewees at Arapahoe County described a system – separate from their main eligibility and benefits system – that is used to track state-required compliance measures, such as time taken to process applications. In Fairfax County, the public assistance agency uses a local financial system, separate from its case management system, for processing benefits payments. It is possible that these systems contain information on refugees that could be of use to researchers and is not available elsewhere.

### 6.3 Implications for Research

Overall, the site visit interviews revealed that agencies and organizations administering TANF, RCA, and related employment services collect and maintain a substantial amount of data that researchers could use to better understand the effectiveness of refugee services. However, variations across sites indicates there is no one-size-fits-all approach to obtaining



such data. Researchers will need to explore the specific arrangements in any state from which they wish to obtain data, and may need to merge data from different sources to construct data sets that contain sufficient data for thorough analysis.

## 7. Conclusions

Many refugees arrive in the United States after having gone through periods full of traumatic experiences and a long resettlement process. Arrival in the United States provides them an opportunity to build a new life free of fear and of persecution. However, adjusting to a new home and culture presents its own difficulties, and refugees must become self-sufficient in a short period of time. As part of the resettlement process, refugees receive assistance from a variety of organizations—resettlement agencies, public assistance agencies, ethnic community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, and schools.

The cash assistance and associated employment services provided to refugees through the TANF and RCA programs are key parts of the assistance refugees receive as they resettle in this country. There is substantial variation in the arrangements and strategies for providing cash assistance and employment services to refugees, which makes a full documentation of the different ways programs provide financial supports and employment services to refugees difficult. The variation in part reflects the many agencies and organizations at the national, state, and local level administering and providing benefits; the various data systems used to document refugee services; and the unique needs of each refugee.

Despite these challenges, this study aimed to provide a better understanding of how TANF and RCA serve refugees at the state and local levels and of innovative strategies observed in the study sites. This information may be useful to administrators and policymakers interested in improving service delivery for refugees, and to researchers interested in building the evidence about the effectiveness of different refugee services and program models.

This chapter presents themes that emerge from the findings presented in earlier chapters, including those that may be of most interest to administrators, policymakers, and researchers. It discusses themes related to the administration of cash assistance and employment services for refugees, and concludes with some considerations about opportunities and directions for future research.

### 7.1 Key Themes Related to Administration of Cash Assistance and Service Delivery

The following themes relate to how the sites administer cash assistance through the TANF and RCA programs:

- ***Refugee-serving organizations are often better equipped to work with refugees than public assistance agencies.*** Public assistance agencies serve the general population, and staff often lack the specialized knowledge, language skills, and experience working with refugees that the refugee-serving organizations possess.
- ***There is a greater need for coordination where the public assistance agency administers cash assistance rather than the resettlement agency.*** Given that many

public assistance agencies are less equipped to serve refugees, steps that facilitate coordination between the public agencies and resettlement agencies or other RSOs can help improve service delivery. Agencies and organizations in the study sites have developed several strategies to facilitate coordination, discussed in Chapter 5, including designating points of contact at the public assistance agencies for refugee cases, and co-locating public agency staff at the resettlement agencies or vice versa.

- **Refugees report that benefit levels are low.** Across almost all sites, refugees and case managers report that cash assistance benefits are not meeting the demands of housing and living costs. Wilson-Fish and Public-Private Partnership models give states the flexibility to increase the level of cash assistance for RCA and TANF refugees beyond those set by the state for TANF.<sup>33</sup>
- **High housing costs affect both refugee well-being and service delivery.** A significant number of SRCs (31 of 48 responding to the question) report that the lack of affordable housing is a serious challenge for refugees. This is particularly acute for refugees resettled in regions where housing costs are high. Housing costs are causing resettlement agencies to resettle refugees in areas within those regions that have more-affordable housing. However, these areas are often relatively far from the resettlement agencies and other refugee-serving organizations, which increases the transportation barriers refugees face in accessing services.

## 7.2 Key Themes Related to Employment Services

The following themes relate to how employment services are provided to refugees receiving RCA or TANF benefits:

- **RCA recipients and many TANF recipients receive refugee-specific employment services, but in some places TANF-receiving refugees receive employment services alongside non-refugees.** TANF programs may contract with RSOs to provide employment services tailored for refugees. As with cash assistance, these organizations' experience and the skills of their staff may better equip them to deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate services to refugees. In many locations, however, refugees receive employment services from the same providers as non-refugees, and services are not often tailored for refugees. A number of interviewees said that in such locations, some TANF-receiving refugees seek refugee-specific employment services, often funded by RSS or TAG, in addition to or instead of TANF employment services. This may have implications for service providers who have limited resources to meet the needs all of their clients in a given year.
- **Employment services for refugees in both RCA and TANF focus on rapid employment.** RCA benefits are limited to eight months, and as noted earlier, refugees see the benefits as insufficient to cover their needs. As a result, refugees receiving RCA

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<sup>33</sup> For TANF-receiving refugees, this is done through TANF differential payments paid by the refugee program.

must find employment quickly, and programs prioritize placing participants in jobs before their benefits end. For refugees served under the TANF program, the same TANF work participation requirements apply as to nonrefugees, and given the work-first nature of the program, TANF work activities also focus on rapid employment. As noted in Chapter 4, though vocational training is available for TANF-receiving refugees in some sites, it is not the focus of most programs

- ***The focus on rapid employment means refugees often take entry-level jobs rather than spending time in services that could help them find better jobs.*** For example, most refugees are unable to speak or read English, which limits their employment opportunities regardless of their other skills. Although employment services programs in all sites provide ESL to refugees receiving both RCA and TANF, the programs still emphasize rapid employment rather than first obtaining a minimum level of proficiency in English that might help more-skilled refugees obtain better jobs. TANF rules limiting how many hours of ESL can count toward work participation requirements reinforce this emphasis on employment over English.
- ***Employment services in refugee-specific programs are more intensive than is typical in mainstream TANF employment services programs.*** Due to the focus on rapid employment, and the challenges new arrivals face finding jobs in an unfamiliar system, employment services programs that work with refugees (both RCA and TANF recipients) provide more individualized assistance than other TANF participants generally receive. Job developers identify employers who will employ refugees and assist with job applications. Examples of promising strategies include accompanying refugees on their job interviews as interpreters, facilitating on-site work orientations, and helping arrange transportation to job sites. Successful job developers establish relationships with employers that can employ many refugees. Some programs have also developed strategies, including re-credentialing programs, to help higher skilled refugees find jobs that build on their professional backgrounds.

## 7.3 Implications for Further Research

Two sets of themes from this study may be of particular interest to researchers. First, the study's findings on data and data systems can inform researchers' approaches to obtaining data on refugee characteristics, services, and outcomes from refugee-serving programs. Second, the study's descriptive findings on how state and local systems serve refugees through TANF and RCA suggest opportunities for future research to add to or go beyond these findings.

### 7.3.1 Data Considerations for Researchers

Chapter 6's overview on data collected by RSOs and public assistance agencies serving refugees suggests that there may be data for use in future studies of refugee services. However, the variety in systems used to store and manage data suggests that researchers are likely to face challenges with accessing the data and that the quality of data may be

inconsistent from source to source. There are several considerations for regarding data availability in different states or localities:

- Given the varied systems, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to obtaining data on refugee services across states (or even within states). Researchers will need to explore the arrangements in each state.
- Understanding data availability requires further examination of the separate systems operated by state agencies, TANF employment services providers, refugee employment services providers, and resettlement agencies. Researchers studying cash assistance and related services for refugees in some locations will likely need to explore multiple separate systems for data on both TANF and RCA recipients.
- Access to any one system is likely to provide only limited information on characteristics of refugees and the services they receive, but there is the potential to merge data from multiple systems to analyze information contained in them together. Indeed, some TANF data systems may not identify refugee status, but merging that data with other datasets may allow identification of refugees within the TANF data.

ACF's understanding of the availability of refugee program data for research would be enhanced by a 50-state scan of refugee program data systems using a survey of reasonable length, with targeted questions focused on the nature of each type of data system, the extent to which they encompass multiple programs, and whether or not they contain key elements of interest.

It is also worth noting other related data sources that might further ACF's knowledge of the services refugees receive and related economic self-sufficiency outcomes. Examples include these:

- The National Directory of New Hires, which contains quarterly employment and earnings.
- The National Student Clearinghouse, which provides information on enrollment in and completion of postsecondary education in the United States.
- Administrative data from other federal or state programs, such as SNAP or Medicaid.

Previous studies have successfully merged some of these datasets to provide measures of refugee program participation and outcomes. An example is the Lewin Group's evaluation of RSS and TAG, conducted in 2004 through 2008.<sup>34</sup> That study combined arrival data from the Department of State's Refugee Arrival Data System (RADS) database, TANF administrative data, administrative data from the Food Stamp Program (now SNAP),

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Farrell, Mary, Bret Barden, and Mike Mueller (2008). *The Evaluation of the Refugee Social Service (RSS) and Targeted Assistance Formula Grant (TAG) Programs: Synthesis of Findings from Three Sites*. (2008). Washington, DC: Office of Refugee Resettlement, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

program data on RSS- and TAG-funded services, Matching Grant data provided by resettlement agencies, and Unemployment Insurance wage data. One challenge in merging data across these various sources was finding a common identifier. For example, the RADS data provided contained alien numbers, whereas the Unemployment Insurance data contained Social Security numbers; however, the TANF and Food Stamp administrative datasets often contained both numbers, making administrative data matching possible.<sup>35</sup>

### 7.3.2 Potential Directions and Topics for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest several next steps researchers could take to expand the knowledge base about cash assistance and employment services for refugees. Given the variation this study documented across states, there may be value in conducting similar information collection as was done in this study at other sites, particularly in states or communities with notably different characteristics than those selected for this study. For example, this study did not include any sites in states with very low TANF cash assistance benefits levels, which can substantially affect how services are delivered to refugees. (For example, the SRC survey identified two states that do not refer refugees to TANF due to low benefit levels, instead referring them to the Matching Grant program.) It also may be interesting to explore service delivery in states where Wilson-Fish programs allow the delivery of TANF cash assistance by resettlement agencies.

In addition, the study's focus was at the county level. Further exploration could be done of coordination at the state level. This study's findings about local program implementation could provide helpful context to further delve into data the study collected through the SRC survey and discussions with state offices while arranging site visits.

Perhaps most important, though this study identified some innovative approaches to service delivery, it did not attempt to assess the effectiveness of any approach for delivering services. Given the diversity of approaches pursued by states and RSOs, understanding the effectiveness of individual strategies is important. Some potential research questions include these:

- Does delivery of cash assistance and/or case management through RSOs or public assistance agencies do a better job in assisting refugees and increasing their employment and self-sufficiency?
- Does participation in refugee-specific employment services lead to different outcomes for refugees than does participating in services with the general TANF population?
- Does offering refugees the option of participating in ESL for longer periods before finding work lead to better long-term employment outcomes?

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<sup>35</sup> The RADS dataset contains Social Security numbers that resettlement agencies submit for refugees as part of 90-day R&P reports, which may be available to future researchers.

- Have re-credentialing programs helped refugees stay in their professional fields and earn more than they would have otherwise earned without them?
- Does participation in occupational training programs improve refugees' employment and earnings over time?

Experimental studies may be possible to answer some of these questions. An experimental design, which compares the outcomes of individuals randomly assigned to either a group receiving one set of services or to a group receiving another set (or none), is considered the “gold standard” in evaluation for measuring effectiveness because that design produces the most accurate and precise estimates of the impact of a program on individuals.

There are some challenges to implementing such studies, however. They require certain minimum sample sizes to identify meaningful effects with statistical significance, so may be feasible only in areas serving large numbers of refugees or by including a large number of areas. Differences in characteristics across groups of refugees may complicate such studies by adding variation in sample outcomes that makes it harder to detect effects, and by raising questions about whether findings based on specific subgroups will apply to others. Further, experimental studies require withholding particular services to some individuals. For that reason, they are most feasible when resource constraints already prevent programs from providing those services to all refugees who might benefit from them. There may be areas where this is the case for a particular training or re-credentialing program. For example, if more refugees want to participate in a certain kind of training than the program's budget can accommodate, it may be possible to select randomly who can participate, and measure the outcomes of those who could participate versus those who could not to see whether there is a difference.

The refugee resettlement process may also present “natural experiments” that would allow researchers to estimate the effectiveness of different types of services. For example, the process by which resettlement agencies choose where to resettle arriving refugees from a particular country may allow researchers to compare groups resettled in areas providing different sets of services to see whether some groups end up with better outcomes than others.

Additional research is a critical part of ensuring policymakers and program administrators serve refugees as effectively as possible. This study explored the variety of ways in which TANF and RCA programs serve refugees. In doing so, it identified promising strategies for serving refugees and helping them on the path to self-sufficiency. As a descriptive study, it did not try to measure the effectiveness of these strategies, but instead aimed expand the knowledge base about how various agencies, organizations, and systems serve refugees in different states and localities. This study can guide researchers as they undertake further evaluations of strategies aimed at helping refugees build successful lives in the United States.

## Appendix A: Organizations Visited by the Research Team and Services Provided, by Site

Organization	Services for Refugees								
	Reception and Placement	RCA Cash Assistance	TANF Cash Assistance	Matching Grant Cash Assistance	TANF Employment Services	Employment Services for RCA Recipients	Other Employment Services	ESL	Other Social Services
<b>Arapahoe County, CO</b>									
Arapahoe County Department of Human Services (DHS)			√						√
African Community Center within the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ACC)	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Lutheran Family Services (LFS)	√	√		√	√	√	√	√	√
Colorado African Organization (CAO)					√		√	√	√
Project Worthmore							√	√	√
Mango House									√
<b>Cook County, IL</b>									
IDHS Special Units Office—Uptown		√	√						√
RefugeeOne	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Chicago	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Iraqi Mutual Aid Society							√		√
Pan-African Association							√		√
Asian Human Services					√				
<b>Fairfax County, VA</b>									
Fairfax County Department of Family Services (DFS)		√	√		√			√ <sup>a</sup>	√
Migration and Refugee Services (MRS)	√			√		√	√		√
Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSS)	√			√		√	√		√



Organization	Services for Refugees								
	Reception and Placement	RCA Cash Assistance	TANF Cash Assistance	Matching Grant Cash Assistance	TANF Employment Services	Employment Services for RCA Recipients	Other Employment Services	ESL	Other Social Services
Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS)									√
<b>Franklin County, OH</b>									
Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS)		√	√						√
Community Refugee and Immigration Services (CRIS)	√				√	√	√	√	√
Ethiopian Tewahedo Social Services (ETSS)					√	√	√	√	√
<b>Jefferson County, KY</b>									
Kentucky Department of Community Based Services			√						√
Kentucky Refugee Ministries, Inc.	√	√		√		√	√	√	√
Catholic Charities Migration and Refugee Services	√	√		√		√	√	√	√
KentuckianaWorks/Power of Work					√		√	√	
Jewish Family and Career Services							√		√
<b>King County, WA</b>									
DSHS King Community Service Office		√	√						
DSHS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance									
Jewish Family Service	√				√	√	√	√	√
TRAC Associates					√	√	√		
World Relief	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Somali Community Services							√		√
Childcare Resources							√		

Organization	Services for Refugees								
	Reception and Placement	RCA Cash Assistance	TANF Cash Assistance	Matching Grant Cash Assistance	TANF Employment Services	Employment Services for RCA Recipients	Other Employment Services	ESL	Other Social Services
<b>Montgomery County, MD</b>									
International Rescue Committee	√	√		√		√	√	√	√
Ethiopian Community Development Council	√	√		√		√	√	√	
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services			√						√
ResCare					√				
Refugee Center at Montgomery College							√	√	
<b>Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI</b>									
MDHHS Oakland County—Madison Heights Office		√	√						√
MDHHS Macomb County—Sterling Heights Office		√	√						√
Samaritas	√			√	√	√	√	√	√
Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan	√							√	
Arab American and Chaldean Council					√		√	√	√
Chaldean Community Foundation							√	√	√

**Note:**

a. ESL for TANF recipients is provided by the Fairfax County Public Schools under contract to DFS. ESL for RCA recipients is provided by referral to external providers, and can be paid for by the resettlement agencies.

## Appendix B: Description of Focus Group Participants

Site	Descriptions
<b>Arapahoe County, CO</b>	13 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 from Bhutan</li> <li>• 5 Women, 7 Men</li> </ul>
<b>Cook County, IL</b>	9 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 from Iraq, 1 from Syria</li> <li>• 6 TANF Recipients, 3 RCA Recipients</li> </ul>
<b>Fairfax County, VA</b>	2 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 from Afghanistan</li> <li>• 1 Woman, 1 Man</li> <li>• 2 RCA Recipients (1 waiting to receive RCA)</li> </ul>
<b>Franklin County, OH</b>	11 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 11 from Bhutan</li> <li>• 3 Women, 8 Men</li> </ul>
<b>Jefferson County, KY</b>	4 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 from Cuba</li> <li>• 3 Women, 1 Man</li> <li>• 1 TANF Recipient, 3 RCA Recipients</li> </ul>
<b>King County, WA</b>	8 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 from Somalia</li> <li>• 8 Women</li> <li>• 6 TANF Recipients, 2 RCA Recipients</li> </ul>
<b>Montgomery County, MD</b>	4 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 from Congo, 1 from Sudan, 1 from Iraq</li> <li>• 1 Woman, 3 Men</li> <li>• 1 TANF Recipient, 2 RCA Recipients, 1 Matching Grant Recipient</li> </ul>
<b>Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI</b>	10 participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 from Iraq and Syria</li> <li>• 6 RCA Recipients, 4 TANF Recipients</li> </ul>

## Appendix C: Local Demographics of Counties Visited by Research Team

	Arapahoe County, CO	Cook County, IL	Fairfax County, VA	Franklin County, OH	Jefferson County, KY	King County, WA	Montgomery County, MD	Oakland/Macomb Counties, MI	United States
<b>Total Population<sup>a</sup></b>	629,241	5,224,823	1,137,472	1,250,269	763,509	2,114,256	1,036,233	1,240,301 / 864,507	321,418,820
<b>Foreign born (%)<sup>b</sup></b>	14.8	21.2	30.0	9.8	6.7	21.2	32.6	11.8 / 10.6	13.2
<b>White, 2016 (%)<sup>c</sup></b>	77.6	65.6	65.8	68.5	72.7	68.9	60.9	76.0 / 81.9	76.9
<b>High school graduate, 2011-2015 (%)<sup>d</sup></b>	92.0	85.3	92.0	90.0	88.9	92.3	91.2	93.3 / 88.9	86.7
<b>Population per sq. mile, 2010<sup>e</sup></b>	716.7	5,495.1	2,766.8	2,186.1	1,948.1	912.9	1,978.2	1,385.7 / 1,754.9	87.4
<b>Median household income (\$) <sup>f</sup></b>	63,265	55,251	112,552	52,341	48,695	75,302	99,435	67,465 / 54,582	53,889
<b>Below poverty level (%)<sup>g</sup></b>	9.2	16.2	6.2	17.1	15.4	9.8	7.5	9.3 / 11.7	12.7
<b>Unemployment rate, 2015 (%)<sup>h</sup></b>	3.7	6.2	3.6	4.1	4.8	4.3	3.9	4.8 / 5.8	5.3

*Sources:*

<sup>a</sup> Census 2015: <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2016/demo/pepest/counties-total.html>

<sup>b</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates

<sup>c</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (PEP). Population and Housing Unit Estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population, Public Law 94-171 Redistricting Data File

<sup>d</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates

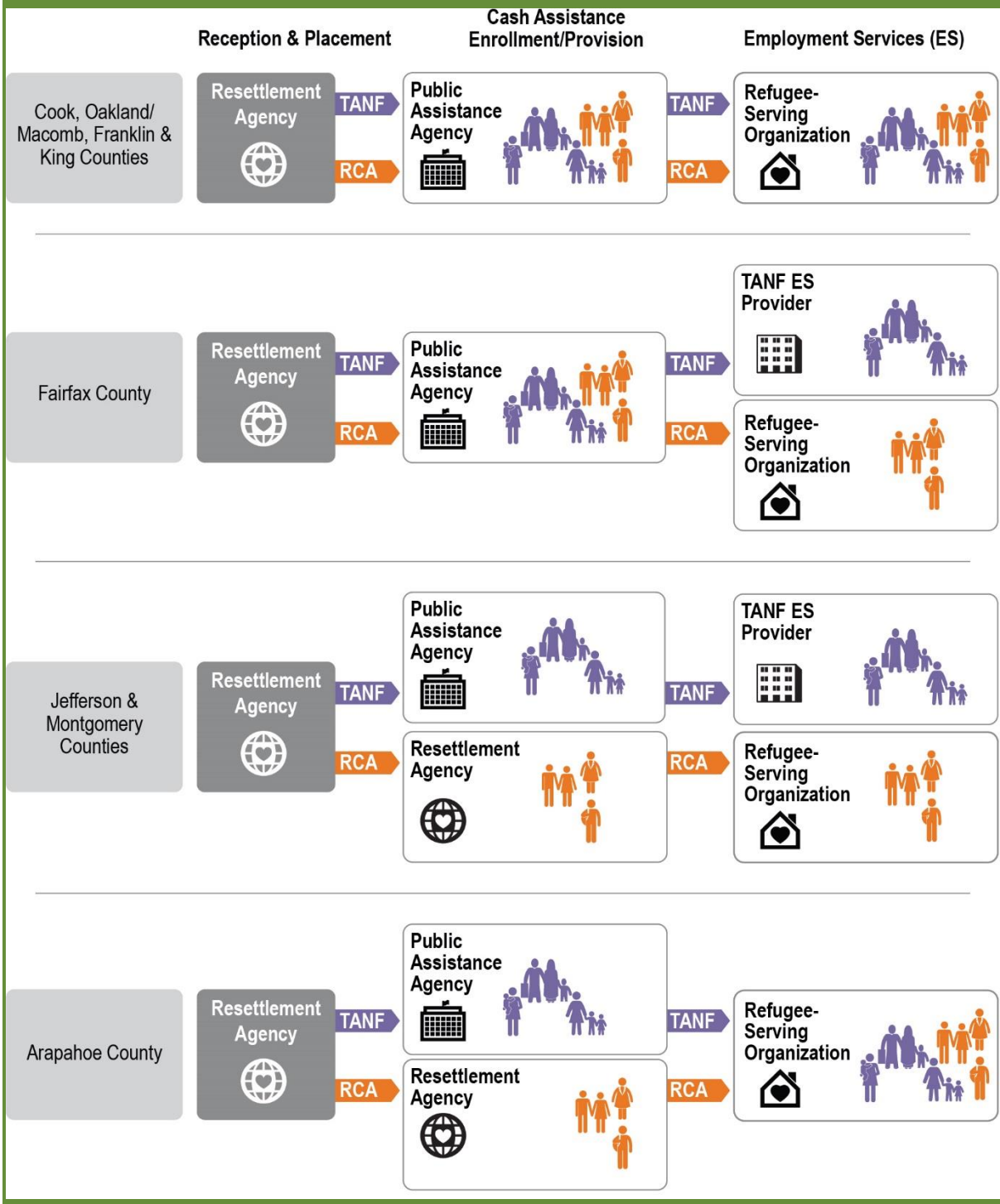
<sup>e</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, data file from Geography Division based on the TIGER/Geographic Identification Code Scheme (TIGER/GICS) computer file; U.S. Census Bureau, Census of Population and Housing. Land area is based on current information in the TIGER® data base, calculated for use with Census 2010.

<sup>f</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) and Puerto Rico Community Survey (PRCS), 5-Year Estimates

<sup>g</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2015

<sup>h</sup> Local Area Unemployment Statistics, 2015

## Appendix D: Pathways for Refugees



## Appendix E: TANF Work Requirements for Single and Two-Parent Head of Unit, 2015, by Study Site State

State	Effective Date	Allowable Activities	Required Hours (Per Week)	Required For
Colorado <sup>a</sup>	Following appraisal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Readiness, Job Search</li> </ul>	Minimum of 22 and maximum of 40	Non-Exempt Recipients
Illinois	31 days after application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic Remedial Education, High School/GED, ESL, Job Skills training, Post-Secondary Education, Counseling</li> </ul> <p><i>If Employment goal does not include education:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job readiness activities, Job search, On-the-job training, Work supplement/subsidized job, Unsubsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Self-employment, Life skills training, Community service, Counseling</li> </ul>	Full-time as defined by the school or a minimum of 30	Non-Exempt Recipients
Kentucky	Upon receipt of benefits	<p><i>First 20 hours of the requirement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Post-secondary education, Job skills training, Job readiness activities, Job development and placement, Unsubsidized job, Work supplement/subsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Child care provider for others, Counseling, Life skills training, Community service</li> </ul> <p><i>Remaining 10 hours of the requirement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic or remedial education, High school/GED, English as 2nd language, Job search</li> </ul>	Minimum of 30	Non-Exempt Recipients
Maryland <sup>b</sup>	At application	<p><i>At least 24 of the hours must be in federally defined core activities, including:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job skills training, Job readiness, Job search, On-the-job training, Unsubsidized job, Work supplement/subsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Self-employment, Child care provider for others, Counseling, Community service.</li> </ul> <p><i>Individuals may participate in the following activities above the 24 hour requirement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic or remedial education, High school/GED, English as a Second Language, Post-secondary education</li> </ul> <p><i>In cases where there is a good cause reason, individuals may be placed in alternative activities allowable by state, but not federal, requirements.</i></p>	40 hours (sanctions are not imposed until the unit falls below 30 countable hours, or 20 countable hours if caring for a child under 6)	Non-Exempt Recipients

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State	Effective Date	Allowable Activities	Required Hours (Per Week)	Required For
Michigan	Immediately	<p>Completion within 30 days of the Family Automated Screening Tool (FAST).<sup>c</sup></p> <p><i>First 20 hours of the core requirement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job search, Job readiness, Vocational training, On-the-job training, CWEP/AWEP, Work supplement/ subsidized job, Unsubsidized job, Child care provider for others, Community service</li> </ul> <p><i>Remaining non-core hours:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-secondary education, Job skills training</li> </ul>	30 (20 for individuals with a child under the age of 6)	Non-Exempt Recipients <sup>d</sup>
Ohio	Upon receipt of benefits	<p><i>First 20 hours of the requirement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsubsidized and subsidized work, CWEP/AWEP, On-the-job training, Job search and Job readiness, Community service, Vocational education training, and providing child care services to an individual who is participating in a community service program. In addition to these activities, the following activities may count toward the remaining hours of the requirement: high school/GED, basic or remedial education, ESL, job skills training directly related to employment.</li> </ul>	18	Non-Exempt Recipients
Virginia	Upon receipt of benefits	<p><i>First 20 hours:</i> Job skills training, Job readiness activities, Job Search, On-Job-Training, Unsubsidized job, Work supplement/subsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Self-employment, and Community Service</p> <p><i>The following activities may count toward the remaining 15 hours of the requirement:</i> Basic or remedial education, High school/GED, English as 2nd language, and Post-Secondary education.</p>	35 hours per week for each family; 30 hours per week if the participant is employed full time	Non-Exempt Recipients
Washington	Upon receipt of benefits	Basic education, High School/GED, ESL, Post-secondary education, Job skills training, Job development and placement, Job search, On-the-job training, Unsubsidized job, Work supplement/subsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Self-employment, Community service, Life skills training, Counseling, and others.	32	Non-Exempt Recipients

Source: The Urban Institute's Welfare Rules Database (2015), funded by the Administration for Children and Families and Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Notes:

a. When a recipient has received benefits for 24 cumulative months, participation in allowable activities to the extent that they are available. The following activities may count towards the required hours: Basic or remedial education, High school/GED, English as 2nd language, Post-secondary education, Job skills training (see note below), Job readiness activities, Job search, On-the-job training, Work supplement/subsidized job, unsubsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, Child care provider for others, Counseling, Life skills training, Community service (see note below). The following activities are countable (i.e., count towards the federal participation rate): basic or remedial education, high school/GED, ESL, and job skills training (see note below), job readiness, job search, on-the-job training, unsubsidized job, work supplement/subsidized job, CWEP/AWEP, community service (see note below), child care provider for others, and other. In addition to these countable activities, the following activities are allowable (i.e., allowable but do not count toward federal participation rate): job search, job readiness, job skills training, counseling, life skills training, community service, and other. NOTE: If Job Skills Training or Community Service is done in combination with education and training (and or family development classes in the case of Community Service), no more than 35 percent of the required hours may consist of education and training.

b. In cases where there is a good cause reason, individuals may be placed in alternative activities allowable by state, but not federal, requirements. An individual's participation in job search and job readiness activities can count for a maximum of 120 hours (recipient with child under age 6) or 180 hours (all other work mandatory recipients) in a fiscal year with no more than four consecutive weeks being countable. Since Maryland is considered a needy state these hours can be extended to recipients whose work activity falls under the J codes (Mental health treatment, rehab services, job search and job readiness, substance abuse treatment) to 240 hours and 360 hours, respectively.

c. The Family Automated Screening Tool (FAST) is a 50-question, web-based survey, completed by the participant, designed to identify an individual's strengths, needs, and barriers to family functioning and successful employment. Information gathered by the FAST pre-fills sections of the Family Self Sufficiency Plan (FSSP). All work-eligible and non-work-eligible applicants who fail to complete a FAST within 30 days are denied FIP.

d. Dependent children who are: age birth to 16; age 16 and 17 and a full-time student in either elementary or high school; or, age 18 and a full-time high school student, are not required to complete the FAST.